

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

IMAGE PROCESSING METHOD AND APPARATUS, CONTROL METHOD
THEREFOR, AND STORAGE MEDIUM

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an image
processing method and apparatus for sensing, recording,
and playing back still and moving images, a control
10 method therefor, and a storage medium which stores a
control program for controlling the image processing
apparatus.

Conventionally, image processing apparatuses such
as electronic cameras and the like, which record/play
15 back still and moving images using memory cards having
solid state memory elements as recording media have
already been commercially available, and electronic
cameras with electronic viewfinders such as color liquid
crystal panels and the like have also been commercially
20 available.

These electronic cameras allow the electronic
camera user to determine the camera angle by
continuously displaying images before sensing, and to
confirm the sensed images by playing back and displaying
25 them.

Especially, the function of generating a panoramic image by combining a plurality of sensed images is very convenient and effective for the electronic camera user.

However, in such conventional image processing
5 apparatus such as an electronic camera or the like,
since it is hard to sense a panoramic image with a
complicated combination of images or to provide a
viewfinder display which is convenient upon sensing a
panoramic image with a complicated combination of images,
10 its image sensing purpose is limited.

When the user of the image processing apparatus
such as an electronic camera or the like has determined
the camera angle, since he or she cannot start panoramic
image sensing in an arbitrary direction, a convenient
15 image processing apparatus cannot be provided.

Furthermore, since neither viewfinder display nor
operation that facilitate re-sensing are available
immediately after sensing of a panoramic image, a
convenient image processing apparatus cannot be provided.

20 Electronic cameras having variable focus lenses or
zoom lenses that can vary the focal length of a
photographing lens are also commercially available.
However, in such conventional image processing apparatus
such as an electronic camera or the like, the user of
25 the image processing apparatus such as an electronic
camera or the like may switch the focal length of a

photographing lens or zoom during sensing a panoramic image. In such case, upon generating a panoramic image by combining a plurality of sensed images, extra computations for correcting different focal lengths are
5 needed, resulting in a considerable drop of image quality.

When individual sensed images have considerably different angles due to switching of the focal length of the photographing lens or zooming, the outer shape of a
10 synthesized panoramic image varies in units of sensed images and has staircasing.

Furthermore, when the user notices during panoramic image sensing that the focal length of the photographing lens has been switched to a side which is
15 not suitable for panoramic image sensing, or that the zoom position of the zoom lens is not suitable for panoramic image sensing, he or she may switch the focal length of the photographing lens or zoom even while a plurality of images are being sensed for panoramic image
20 sensing, thus posing the above-mentioned problems.

In an electronic camera that uses exchangeable lenses, it is possible for the electronic camera user to determine the camera angle of a panoramic image and sense in correspondence with the selected lens, and such
25 function is effective for the electronic camera user. However, in such conventional image processing apparatus

such as an electronic camera or the like, the user of the image processing apparatus such as an electronic camera or the like may exchange the photographing lens by another lens with a different focal length. In such
5 case, upon generating a panoramic image by combining a plurality of sensed images, extra computations for correcting different focal lengths between the former and latter lenses are needed, resulting in a considerable drop of image quality.

10 When individual sensed images have considerably different angles due to exchange of the photographing lens by another lens with a different focal length, the outer shape of a synthesized panoramic image varies in units of sensed images and has staircasing.

15 Not only upon panoramic image sensing but also upon mounting a detached photographing lens again, the previous setup state corresponding to that photographing lens must be re-set, resulting in inconvenience.

20 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention has been made in consideration of the aforementioned problems of the prior art and has as its object to provide a convenient image processing method and apparatus, which do not
25 limit image sensing purposes.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a storage medium storing a control program that can smoothly control the image processing apparatus of the present invention.

5 It is still another object of the present invention to provide an image processing apparatus which does not pose any problem in panoramic image sensing even when a lens having a function of changing its focal length is used, its control method, and a storage medium.

10 It is still another object of the present invention to provide an image processing apparatus which does not pose any problem in panoramic image sensing even when a lens is exchangeable, its control method, and a storage medium.

15 In order to solve the above-mentioned problems and to achieve the above objects, an image processing method according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its first aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
20 method for recording a plurality of sensed images on a recording medium, and playing back and displaying the images, comprising: the image sensing step of sensing an image; the recording/playback step of recording and playing back the image sensed in the image sensing step;
25 and the display step of playing back and displaying an image sensed at least before a current image, wherein

the display step comprises a plurality of display layout
modes for displaying the current image sensing signal,
and a signal obtained by playing back the image sensed
at least before the current image with partial boundary
5 regions thereof overlapping each other.

An image processing apparatus according to the
present invention is characterized by the following
arrangement according to its first aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
10 apparatus for recording a plurality of sensed images on
a recording medium, and playing back and displaying the
images, comprising: image sensing means for sensing an
image; recording/playback means for recording and
playing back the image sensed by the image sensing
15 means; and display means for playing back and displaying
an image sensed at least before a current image, wherein
the display means comprises a plurality of display
layout modes for displaying the current image sensing
signal, and a signal obtained by playing back the image
20 sensed at least before the current image with partial
boundary regions thereof overlapping each other.

An image processing method according to the
present invention is characterized by the following
arrangement according to its second aspect.

25 That is, there is provided an image processing
method for recording a plurality of sensed images on a

recording medium, and playing back and displaying the
images, comprising: the image sensing step of sensing an
image; the recording/playback step of recording and
playing back the image sensed in the image sensing step;
5 and the display step of playing back and displaying an
image sensed at least before a current image, wherein
the display step comprises a display layout mode for
laying out and displaying the current image sensing
signal, and a signal obtained by playing back the image
10 sensed at least before the current image in one
direction with partial boundary regions thereof
overlapping each other, and a function of reversing the
layout direction in the one direction.

An image processing apparatus according to the
15 present invention is characterized by the following
arrangement according to its second aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
apparatus for recording a plurality of sensed images on
a recording medium, and playing back and displaying the
20 images, comprising: image sensing means for sensing an
image; recording/playback means for recording and
playing back the image sensed by the image sensing
means; and display means for playing back and displaying
an image sensed at least before a current image, wherein
25 the display means comprises a display layout mode for
laying out and displaying the current image sensing

signal, and a signal obtained by playing back the image sensed at least before the current image in one direction with partial boundary regions thereof overlapping each other, and a function of reversing the layout direction in the one direction.

An image processing method according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its third aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing method for recording a plurality of sensed images on a recording medium, and playing back and displaying the images, comprising: the image sensing step of sensing an image; the recording/playback step of recording and playing back the image sensed in the image sensing step; the display step of playing back and displaying an image sensed at least before a current image; and the switching step of switching a first display layout mode for laying out and displaying the current image sensing signal, and a signal obtained by playing back the image sensed at least before the current image in one direction with partial boundary regions thereof overlapping each other, and a second display layout mode for laying out and displaying the signal obtained by playing back the image sensed at least before the current image, and a signal obtained by playing back an image sensed still before the signal in the one

direction with partial boundary regions thereof
overlapping each other.

An image processing apparatus according to the
present invention is characterized by the following
5 arrangement according to its third aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
apparatus for recording a plurality of sensed images on
a recording medium, and playing back and displaying the
images, comprising: image sensing means for sensing an
10 image; recording/playback means for recording and
playing back the image sensed by the image sensing
means; display means for playing back and displaying an
image sensed at least before a current image; and
switching means for switching a first display layout
15 mode for laying out and displaying the current image
sensing signal, and a signal obtained by playing back
the image sensed at least before the current image in
one direction with partial boundary regions thereof
overlapping each other, and a second display layout mode
20 for laying out and displaying the signal obtained by
playing back the image sensed at least before the
current image, and a signal obtained by playing back an
image sensed still before the signal in the one
direction with partial boundary regions thereof
25 overlapping each other.

An image processing method according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its fourth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
5 method for recording a plurality of sensed images on a recording medium, and playing back and displaying the images, comprising: the image sensing step of sensing an image; the recording/playback step of recording and playing back the image sensed in the image sensing step;
10 and the display step of playing back and displaying an image sensed at least before a current image, wherein the display step comprises a display layout mode for laying out and displaying the current image sensing signal, and a signal obtained by playing back the image
15 sensed at least before the current image in two directions with partial boundary regions thereof overlapping each other, and includes the selection step of selecting an arbitrary one of display regions laid out in the display layout mode.

20 An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its fourth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing apparatus for recording a plurality of sensed images on
25 a recording medium, and playing back and displaying the images, comprising: image sensing means for sensing an

image; recording/playback means for recording and
playing back the image sensed by the image sensing
means; and display means for playing back and displaying
an image sensed at least before a current image, wherein
5 the display means comprises a display layout mode for
laying out and displaying the current image sensing
signal, and a signal obtained by playing back the image
sensed at least before the current image in two
directions with partial boundary regions thereof
10 overlapping each other, and includes selection means for
selecting an arbitrary one of display regions laid out
in the display layout mode.

A storage medium according to the present
invention is characterized by the following arrangement
15 according to its first aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium which
stores a control program for controlling an image
processing apparatus for recording a plurality of sensed
images on a recording medium, and playing back and
20 displaying the images, the control program having
control modules of the steps of: sensing an image;
recording and playing back the sensed image; playing
back and displaying an image sensed at least before a
current image; and controlling to execute a plurality of
25 display layout modes for displaying the current image
sensing signal, and a signal obtained by playing back

the image sensed at least before the current image with partial boundary regions thereof overlapping each other.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement
5 according to its second aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium which stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus for recording a plurality of sensed images on a recording medium, and playing back and
10 displaying the images, the control program having control modules of the steps of: sensing an image; recording and playing back the sensed image; playing back and displaying an image sensed at least before a current image; and controlling to execute a display
15 layout mode for laying out and displaying the current image sensing signal, and a signal obtained by playing back the image sensed at least before the current image in one direction with partial boundary regions thereof overlapping each other, and a function of reversing the
20 layout direction in the one direction.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its third aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium which
25 stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus for recording a plurality of sensed

images on a recording medium, and playing back and
displaying the images, the control program having
control modules of the steps of: sensing an image;
recording and playing back the sensed image; playing
5 back and displaying an image sensed at least before a
current image; and controlling to switch a first display
layout mode for laying out and displaying the current
image sensing signal, and a signal obtained by playing
back the image sensed at least before the current image
10 in one direction with partial boundary regions thereof
overlapping each other, and a second display layout mode
for laying out and displaying the signal obtained by
playing back the image sensed at least before the
current image, and a signal obtained by playing back an
15 image sensed still before the signal in the one
direction with partial boundary regions thereof
overlapping each other.

A storage medium according to the present
invention is characterized by the following arrangement
20 according to its fourth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium which
stores a control program for controlling an image
processing apparatus for recording a plurality of sensed
images on a recording medium, and playing back and
25 displaying the images, the control program having
control modules of the steps of: sensing an image;

recording and playing back the sensed image; playing
back and displaying an image sensed at least before a
current image; and controlling to select an arbitrary
one of display regions laid out in a display layout mode
5 for laying out and displaying the current image sensing
signal, and a signal obtained by playing back the image
sensed at least before the current image in two
directions with partial boundary regions thereof
overlapping each other.

10 An image processing apparatus according to the
present invention is characterized by the following
arrangement according to its fifth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of
15 sensed still images and/or moving images in storage
means, comprising: image sensing means comprising an
image sensing lens which can change a focal length;
storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed
by the image sensing means in association with each
20 other; focal length change instruction means for
outputting an instruction for changing the focal length
of the image sensing lens; and control means for
controlling to inhibit the focal length of the image
sensing lens from changing upon reception of the
25 instruction for changing the focal length of the image
sensing lens from the focal length change instruction

means after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its sixth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage means, comprising: image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length; storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other; focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens; display means for displaying predetermined information on an external unit; and control means for controlling the display means to display alert information upon reception of the instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens from the focal length change instruction means after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its seventh aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
5 apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage means, comprising: image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length; storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed
10 by the image sensing means in association with each other; focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens; display means for displaying predetermined information on an external unit; and
15 control means for controlling the display means to display alert information and inhibiting the focal length of the image sensing lens from changing upon reception of the instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens from the focal length
20 change instruction means after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following
25 arrangement according to its eighth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage means, comprising: image sensing means comprising an
5 image sensing lens which can change a focal length; storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other; focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length
10 of the image sensing lens; and control means for controlling to start image sensing of a plurality of new images to be stored in association with each other upon reception of the instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens from the focal length
15 change instruction means after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following
20 arrangement according to its ninth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage means, comprising: image sensing means comprising an
25 image sensing lens which can change a focal length; storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed

by the image sensing means in association with each
other; focal length change instruction means for
outputting an instruction for changing the focal length
of the image sensing lens; display means for displaying
5 predetermined information on an external unit; and
control means for controlling the display means to
display alert information and then starting image
sensing of a plurality of new images to be stored in
association with each other upon reception of the
10 instruction for changing the focal length of the image
sensing lens from the focal length change instruction
means after a first one of the plurality of images to be
stored in the storage means in association with each
other is sensed and stored.

15 An image processing apparatus according to the
present invention is characterized by the following
arrangement according to its tenth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of
20 sensed still images and/or moving images in storage
means, comprising: image sensing means comprising an
image sensing lens which can change a focal length;
storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed
by the image sensing means in association with each
25 other; focal length change instruction means for
outputting an instruction for changing the focal length

of the image sensing lens; and control means for
controlling to set the focal length of the image sensing
lens at an initial value before sensing of a first one
of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage
5 means in association with each other is started.

A control method for an image processing apparatus
according to the present invention is characterized by
the following arrangement according to its first aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an
10 image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing
means comprising an image sensing lens which can change
a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of
images sensed by the image sensing means in association
with each other, and focal length change instruction
15 means for outputting an instruction for changing the
focal length of the image sensing lens, comprising the
step of: inhibiting the focal length of the image
sensing lens from changing upon reception of the
instruction for changing the focal length of the image
20 sensing lens from the focal length change instruction
means after a first one of the plurality of images to be
stored in the storage means in association with each
other is sensed and stored.

A control method for an image processing apparatus
25 according to the present invention is characterized by
the following arrangement according to its second aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of
5 images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens, and display means for displaying predetermined information on an external unit,
10 comprising the step of: controlling the display means to display alert information upon reception of the instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens from the focal length change instruction means after a first one of the plurality of images to be
15 stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A control method for an image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its third aspect.

20 That is, there is provided a control method for an image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association
25 with each other, focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal

length of the image sensing lens, and display means for
displaying predetermined information on an external unit,
comprising the step of: controlling the display means to
display alert information and inhibiting the focal
5 length of the image sensing lens from changing upon
reception of the instruction for changing the focal
length of the image sensing lens from the focal length
change instruction means after a first one of the
plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in
10 association with each other is sensed and stored.

A control method for an image processing apparatus
according to the present invention is characterized by
the following arrangement according to its fourth aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an
15 image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing
means comprising an image sensing lens which can change
a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of
images sensed by the image sensing means in association
with each other, and focal length change instruction
20 means for outputting an instruction for changing the
focal length of the image sensing lens, comprising the
step of: starting image sensing of a plurality of new
images to be stored in association with each other upon
reception of the instruction for changing the focal
25 length of the image sensing lens from the focal length
change instruction means after a first one of the

plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A control method for an image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by
5 the following arrangement according to its fifth aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of
10 images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens, and display means for displaying predetermined information on an external unit,
15 comprising the step of: controlling the display means to display alert information and then starting image sensing of a plurality of new images to be stored in association with each other upon reception of the instruction for changing the focal length of the image
20 sensing lens from the focal length change instruction means after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A control method for an image processing apparatus
25 according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its sixth aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of
5 images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, and focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens, comprising the step of: setting the focal length of the image sensing
10 lens at an initial value before sensing of a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is started.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement
15 according to its fifth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a
20 focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, and focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens, the control
25 program comprising a code of the step of: inhibiting the focal length of the image sensing lens from changing

upon reception of the instruction for changing the focal
length of the image sensing lens from the focal length
change instruction means after a first one of the
plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in
5 association with each other is sensed and stored.

A storage medium according to the present
invention is characterized by the following arrangement
according to its sixth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that
10 stores a control program for controlling an image
processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means
comprising an image sensing lens which can change a
focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of
images sensed by the image sensing means in association
15 with each other, focal length change instruction means
for outputting an instruction for changing the focal
length of the image sensing lens, and display means for
displaying predetermined information on an external unit,
the control program comprising a code of the step of:
20 controlling the display means to display alert
information upon reception of the instruction for
changing the focal length of the image sensing lens from
the focal length change instruction means after a first
one of the plurality of images to be stored in the
25 storage means in association with each other is sensed
and stored.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its seventh aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that

5 stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association

10 with each other, focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens, and display means for displaying predetermined information on an external unit, the control program comprising a code of the step of:

15 controlling the display means to display alert information and inhibiting the focal length of the image sensing lens from changing upon reception of the instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens from the focal length change instruction

20 means after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement

25 according to its eighth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, and focal length change instruction means for outputting an instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens, the control program comprising a code of the step of: starting image sensing of a plurality of new images to be stored in association with each other upon reception of the instruction for changing the focal length of the image sensing lens from the focal length change instruction means after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its ninth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means comprising an image sensing lens which can change a focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association

with each other, focal length change instruction means
for outputting an instruction for changing the focal
length of the image sensing lens, and display means for
displaying predetermined information on an external unit,
5 the control program comprising a code of the step of:
controlling the display means to display alert
information and then starting image sensing of a
plurality of new images to be stored in association with
each other upon reception of the instruction for
10 changing the focal length of the image sensing lens from
the focal length change instruction means after a first
one of the plurality of images to be stored in the
storage means in association with each other is sensed
and stored.

15 A storage medium according to the present
invention is characterized by the following arrangement
according to its tenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that
stores a control program for controlling an image
20 processing apparatus which comprises image sensing means
comprising an image sensing lens which can change a
focal length, storage means for storing a plurality of
images sensed by the image sensing means in association
with each other, and focal length change instruction
25 means for outputting an instruction for changing the
focal length of the image sensing lens, the control

program comprising a code of the step of: setting the focal length of the image sensing lens at an initial value before sensing of a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is started.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its eleventh aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage means, comprising: a detachable lens unit; image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit; storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other; detection means for detecting attachment/detachment of the lens unit; display means for displaying predetermined information on an external unit; and control means for controlling the display means to display alert information when the detection means detects detachment of the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its twelfth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
5 apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of
sensed still images and/or moving images in storage
means, comprising: a detachable lens unit; image sensing
means for sensing an object image formed by the lens
unit; storage means for storing a plurality of images
10 sensed by the image sensing means in association with
each other; detection means for detecting
attachment/detachment of the lens unit; and control
means for controlling to start sensing of a plurality of
new images to be stored in association with each other
15 when the detection means detects detachment of the lens
unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be
stored in the storage means in association with each
other is sensed and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the
20 present invention is characterized by the following
arrangement according to its thirteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of
sensed still images and/or moving images in storage
25 means, comprising: a detachable lens unit; image sensing
means for sensing an object image formed by the lens

unit; storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other; detection means for detecting attachment/detachment of the lens unit; display means
5 for displaying predetermined information on an external unit; and control means for controlling the display means to display alert information and then starting sensing of a plurality of new images to be stored in association with each other when the detection means
10 detects detachment of the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the
15 present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its fourteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage
20 means, comprising: a detachable lens unit; image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit; storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other; instruction means for instructing
25 attachment/detachment of the lens unit; and control means for controlling to inhibit the lens unit from

being detached when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed
5 and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its fifteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
10 apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage means, comprising: a detachable lens unit; image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit; storage means for storing a plurality of images
15 sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other; instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit; display means for displaying predetermined information on an external unit; and control means for controlling the display
20 means to display alert information and inhibiting the lens unit from being detached when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is
25 sensed and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its sixteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
5 apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of
sensed still images and/or moving images in storage
means, comprising: a detachable lens unit; image sensing
means for sensing an object image formed by the lens
unit; storage means for storing a plurality of images
10 sensed by the image sensing means in association with
each other; instruction means for instructing
attachment/detachment of the lens unit; and control
means for controlling to permit detachment of the lens
unit when the instruction means outputs an instruction
15 for detaching the lens unit before a first one of the
plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in
association with each other is sensed and stored, and
for controlling to inhibit the lens unit from being
detached when the instruction means outputs an
20 instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first
one of the plurality of images to be stored in the
storage means in association with each other is sensed
and stored.

An image processing apparatus according to the
25 present invention is characterized by the following
arrangement according to its seventeenth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage means, comprising: a detachable lens unit having
5 nonvolatile storage means; image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit; storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other; instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment
10 of the lens unit; and control means for controlling to permit detachment of the lens unit after information pertaining to an operation state of the lens unit is stored in the nonvolatile storage means, when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching
15 the lens unit, and for reading out information pertaining to a use state of the lens unit stored in the nonvolatile storage means and re-setting an operation state of the image processing apparatus in accordance with the readout information, when the lens unit is
20 attached again.

An image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its eighteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided an image processing
25 apparatus having a function of storing a plurality of sensed still images and/or moving images in storage

means, comprising: a detachable lens unit having
nonvolatile storage means; image sensing means for
sensing an object image formed by the lens unit; storage
means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the
5 image sensing means in association with each other;
instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment
of the lens unit; and control means for controlling to
permit detachment of the lens unit after information
pertaining to an operation state of the lens unit and
10 user information are stored in the nonvolatile storage
means, when the instruction means outputs an instruction
for detaching the lens unit, and for reading out
information pertaining to a use state of the lens unit
and the user information stored in the nonvolatile
15 storage means and re-setting an operation state of the
image processing apparatus in accordance with the
readout information in unit of users, when the lens unit
is attached again.

A control method for an image processing apparatus
20 according to the present invention is characterized by
the following arrangement according to its seventh
aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an
image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable
25 lens unit, image sensing means for sensing an object
image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing

A control method for an image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its ninth aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an
5 image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable
lens unit, image sensing means for sensing an object
image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing
a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means
in association with each other, detection means for
10 detecting attachment/detachment of the lens unit, and
display means for displaying predetermined information
on an external unit, comprising the step of: controlling
the display means to display alert information and then
starting sensing of a plurality of new images to be
15 stored in association with each other when the detection
means detects detachment of the lens unit after a first
one of the plurality of images to be stored in the
storage means in association with each other is sensed
and stored.

20 A control method for an image processing apparatus
according to the present invention is characterized by
the following arrangement according to its tenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an
image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable
25 lens unit, image sensing means for sensing an object
image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing

a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, and instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit, comprising the step of: inhibiting the lens unit from
5 being detached when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

10 A control method for an image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its eleventh aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an
15 image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens unit, image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, instruction means for
20 instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit, and display means for displaying predetermined information on an external unit, comprising the step of: controlling the display means to display alert information and inhibiting the lens unit from being detached when the
25 instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of

images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A control method for an image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by
5 the following arrangement according to its twelfth aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens unit, image sensing means for sensing an object
10 image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, and instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit, comprising the step of: permitting detachment of the
15 lens unit when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit before a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored, and inhibiting the lens unit from being
20 detached when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

25 A control method for an image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by

the following arrangement according to its thirteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a control method for an image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable
5 lens unit having nonvolatile storage means, image
sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the
lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of
images sensed by the image sensing means in association
with each other, and instruction means for instructing
10 attachment/detachment of the lens unit, comprising the
step of: permitting detachment of the lens unit after
information pertaining to an operation state of the lens
unit is stored in the nonvolatile storage means, when
the instruction means outputs an instruction for
15 detaching the lens unit, and reading out information
pertaining to a use state of the lens unit stored in the
nonvolatile storage means and re-setting an operation
state of the image processing apparatus in accordance
with the readout information, when the lens unit is
20 attached again.

A control method for an image processing apparatus according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its fourteenth aspect.

25 That is, there is provided a control method for an image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable

lens unit having nonvolatile storage means, image
sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the
lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of
images sensed by the image sensing means in association
5 with each other, and instruction means for instructing
attachment/detachment of the lens unit, comprising the
step of: permitting detachment of the lens unit after
information pertaining to an operation state of the lens
unit and user information are stored in the nonvolatile
10 storage means, when the instruction means outputs an
instruction for detaching the lens unit, and reading out
information pertaining to a use state of the lens unit
and the user information stored in the nonvolatile
storage means and re-setting an operation state of the
15 image processing apparatus in accordance with the
readout information in unit of users, when the lens unit
is attached again.

A storage medium according to the present
invention is characterized by the following arrangement
20 according to its eleventh aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that
stores a control program for controlling an image
processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens
unit, image sensing means for sensing an object image
25 formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a
plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in

association with each other, detection means for
detecting attachment/detachment of the lens unit, and
display means for displaying predetermined information
on an external unit, the control program comprising a
5 code of the step of: controlling the display means to
display alert information when the detection means
detects detachment of the lens unit after a first one of
the plurality of images to be stored in the storage
means in association with each other is sensed and
10 stored.

A storage medium according to the present
invention is characterized by the following arrangement
according to its twelfth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that
15 stores a control program for controlling an image
processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens
unit, image sensing means for sensing an object image
formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a
plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in
20 association with each other, and detection means for
detecting attachment/detachment of the lens unit, the
control program comprising a code of the step of:
starting sensing of a plurality of new images to be
stored in association with each other when the detection
25 means detects detachment of the lens unit after a first
one of the plurality of images to be stored in the

storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement
5 according to its thirteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens unit, image sensing means for sensing an object image
10 formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, detection means for detecting attachment/detachment of the lens unit, and display means for displaying predetermined information
15 on an external unit, the control program comprising a code of the step of: controlling the display means to display alert information and then starting sensing of a plurality of new images to be stored in association with each other when the detection means detects detachment'
20 of the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement
25 according to its fourteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens unit, image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, and instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit, the control program comprising a code of the step of:

inhibiting the lens unit from being detached when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

15 A storage medium according to the present
invention is characterized by the following arrangement
according to its fifteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens unit, image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit, and display means for displaying predetermined information

on an external unit, the control program comprising a code of the step of: controlling the display means to display alert information and inhibiting the lens unit from being detached when the instruction means outputs
5 an instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

A storage medium according to the present
10 invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its sixteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens
15 unit, image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, and instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit, the
20 control program comprising a code of the step of: permitting detachment of the lens unit when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit before a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association
25 with each other is sensed and stored, and inhibiting the lens unit from being detached when the instruction means

outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit after a first one of the plurality of images to be stored in the storage means in association with each other is sensed and stored.

5 A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its seventeenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that stores a control program for controlling an image
10 processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens unit having nonvolatile storage means, image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of images sensed by the image sensing means in association with
15 each other, and instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit, the control program comprising a code of the step of: permitting detachment of the lens unit after information pertaining to an operation state of the lens unit is stored in the
20 nonvolatile storage means, when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit, and reading out information pertaining to a use state of the lens unit stored in the nonvolatile storage means and re-setting an operation state of the image processing
25 apparatus in accordance with the readout information, when the lens unit is attached again.

A storage medium according to the present invention is characterized by the following arrangement according to its eighteenth aspect.

That is, there is provided a storage medium that
5 stores a control program for controlling an image processing apparatus which comprises a detachable lens unit having nonvolatile storage means, image sensing means for sensing an object image formed by the lens unit, storage means for storing a plurality of images
10 sensed by the image sensing means in association with each other, and instruction means for instructing attachment/detachment of the lens unit, the control program comprising a code of the step of: permitting detachment of the lens unit after information pertaining
15 to an operation state of the lens unit and user information are stored in the nonvolatile storage means, when the instruction means outputs an instruction for detaching the lens unit, and reading out information pertaining to a use state of the lens unit and the user
20 information stored in the nonvolatile storage means and re-setting an operation state of the image processing apparatus in accordance with the readout information in unit of users, when the lens unit is attached again.

Other objects and advantages besides those
25 discussed above shall be apparent to those skilled in the art from the description of a preferred embodiment

of the invention which follows. In the description,
reference is made to accompanying drawings, which form a
part hereof, and which illustrate an example of the
invention. Such example, however, is not exhaustive of
5 the various embodiments of the invention, and therefore
reference is made to the claims which follow the
description for determining the scope of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

10 ^{1st} Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing the arrangement
of an image processing apparatus according to the first
embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a flow chart of a main routine of the
image processing apparatus according to the first
15 embodiment;

Fig. 3 is a flow chart of the main routine of the
image processing apparatus according to the first
embodiment;

Fig. 4 is a flow chart of the main routine of the
20 image processing apparatus according to the first
embodiment;

Fig. 5 is a flow chart of a distance
measurement/photometry process routine of the image
processing apparatus;

25 Fig. 6 is a flow chart of an image sensing process
routine of the image processing apparatus;

Fig. 7 is a flow chart of a display image process routine of the image processing apparatus;

Fig. 8 is a flow chart of a compression process routine of the image processing apparatus;

5 Fig. 9 is an explanatory view of a panoramic image sensing mode setup window of the image processing apparatus;

10 Figs. 10A and 10B are explanatory views of an initial horizontal panoramic mode window of the image processing apparatus;

Figs. 11A and 11B are explanatory views of an initial vertical panoramic mode window of the image processing apparatus;

15 Figs. 12A and 12B are explanatory views of a 2 x 2 panoramic mode image sensing window of the image processing apparatus;

Figs. 13A and 13B are explanatory views of a 2 x 2 panoramic mode image sensing window of the image processing apparatus;

20 Figs. 14A and 14B are explanatory views of a horizontal panoramic mode image sensing window of the image processing apparatus;

25 Figs. 15A and 15B are explanatory views of a vertical panoramic mode image sensing window of the image processing apparatus;

Fig. 16 is a block diagram showing the arrangement of an image processing apparatus according to the second embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 17 is a flow chart of a main routine showing the operation of the image processing apparatus according to the second embodiment;

Fig. 18 is a flow chart of the main routine showing the operation of the image processing apparatus according to the second embodiment;

Fig. 19 is a flow chart of the main routine showing the operation of the image processing apparatus according to the second embodiment;

Fig. 20 is a flow chart of the main routine showing the operation of the image processing apparatus according to the second embodiment;

Fig. 21 is a flow chart of the main routine showing the operation of the image processing apparatus according to the second embodiment;

Fig. 22 is a flow chart of a main routine according to the third embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 23 is a flow chart of the main routine according to the third embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 24 is a flow chart of the main routine according to the third embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 25 is a flow chart of the main routine according to the third embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 26 is a flow chart of the main routine according to the third embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 27 is a flow chart of a main routine showing the operation of an image processing apparatus according to the fourth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 28 is a flow chart of the main routine showing the operation of an image processing apparatus according to the fourth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 29 is a flow chart of the main routine showing the operation of an image processing apparatus according to the fourth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 30 is a flow chart of the main routine showing the operation of an image processing apparatus according to the fourth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 31 is a block diagram showing the arrangement of an image processing apparatus according to the fifth embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 32 is a flow chart of a main routine of the fifth embodiment;

Fig. 33 is a flow chart of the main routine of the fifth embodiment;

Fig. 34 is a flow chart of the main routine of the fifth embodiment;

Fig. 35 is a flow chart of the main routine of the fifth embodiment; and

Fig. 36 is a flow chart of the main routine of the fifth embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The preferred embodiments of the present invention will be described in detail hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings.

(First Embodiment)

Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing the arrangement of an image processing apparatus according to the first embodiment. Referring to Fig. 1, reference numeral 100 denotes an image processing apparatus; and 101, a photographing lens used for sensing an object image.

Reference numeral 102 denotes a shutter with a stop function. Reference numeral 103 denotes an image sensing

element for converting an optical image into an electrical signal. Reference numeral 104 denotes an A/D converter for converting an analog signal output from the image sensing element 103 into a digital signal.

5 Reference numeral 105 denotes a timing generation circuit for supplying clock signals and control signals to the image sensing element 103, the A/D converter 104, and a D/A converter 109 (to be described later). The timing generation circuit 105 is controlled by a memory
10 control circuit 107 and system control circuit 118 (to be described later).

Reference numeral 106 denotes an image processing circuit which performs predetermined pixel interpolation and color conversion for data supplied from the A/D
15 converter 104 or the memory control circuit 107 (to be described later). The image processing circuit 106 makes a predetermined computation using sensed image data to execute a TTL (Through The Lens) AF (auto focus) process, AE (auto exposure) process, and EF (flash pre-emission)
20 process in which the system control circuit 118 controls an exposure control means 113 and distance measurement control means 114 (to be described later) on the basis of the obtained computation result. Furthermore, the image processing circuit 106 makes a predetermined
25 computation using sensed image data, and executes a TTL

AWB (auto white balance) process on the basis of the obtained computation result.

Reference numeral 107 denotes the memory control circuit, which controls the A/D converter 104, the
5 timing generation circuit 105, the image processing circuit 106, an image display unit 110 (to be described later), the D/A converter 109 (to be described later), a memory 111 (to be described later), and a compression/expansion circuit 32 (to be described later).
10 Data output from the A/D converter 104 is written in an image display memory 108 or memory 111 (to be described later) via the image processing circuit 106 and memory control circuit 107 or directly via the memory control circuit 107.

15 Reference numeral 108 denotes the image display memory. Reference numeral 109 denotes the D/A converter for converting a digital signal into an analog signal. Reference numeral 110 denotes the image display unit comprising a TFT-LCD (thin film transistor liquid
20 crystal display) or the like. Display image data written in the image display memory 108 is displayed by the image display unit 110 via the D/A converter 109. When sensed image data are displayed at image sensing timings using the image display unit 110, an electronic
25 viewfinder function can be implemented. The image display unit 110 can arbitrarily turn on/off its display

in response to an instruction from the system control circuit 118 (to be described later). When the display is turned off, consumption power of the image processing apparatus 100 can be greatly reduced.

5 Reference numeral 111 denotes the memory for storing a still image and moving image. The memory 111 has a storage capacity large enough to store a predetermined number of still images or a moving image for a predetermined period of time. With this
10 arrangement, even in a continuous or panoramic image sensing mode for continuously sensing a plurality of still images, many images can be written in the memory 111 at high speed. Also, the memory 111 can be used as a work area of the system control circuit 118 (to be
15 described later).

 Reference numeral 112 denotes the compression/expansion circuit for compressing/expanding image data by adaptive discrete cosine transformation (ADCT) or the like. The compression/expansion circuit
20 112 reads an image stored in the memory 111, compresses or expands it, and writes the processed data in the memory 111. Reference numeral 113 denotes the exposure control means for controlling the shutter 102. The exposure control means 113 also has a flash light
25 control function in cooperation with an electronic flash 117 (to be described later). Reference numeral 114

denotes the distance measurement control means for
controlling focusing of the photographing lens 101.
Reference numeral 115 denotes a zoom control means for
controlling zooming. Reference numeral 116 denotes a
5 barrier control means for controlling operation of a
protection means (to be described later) serving as a
barrier. Reference numeral 117 denotes the electronic
flash which has a function of projecting AF auxiliary
light and the flash light control function.

10 The exposure control means 113 and distance
measurement control means 114 are controlled using TTL,
and the system control circuit 118 controls the exposure
control means 113 and distance measurement control means
114 on the basis of the computation result of the image
15 processing circuit 106 using sensed image data.

Reference numeral 118 denotes the system control
circuit for controlling the overall image processing
apparatus 100. Reference numeral 119 denotes a memory
for storing constants, variables, programs, and the like
20 for operations of the system control circuit 118.

Reference numeral 120 denotes an indication unit which
includes a liquid crystal display device, loudspeaker,
and the like for indicating operation states, messages,
and the like using characters, images, voices, and the
25 like in accordance with execution of a program by the
system control circuit 118. The indication unit 120 is

placed at one or a plurality of easy-to-see positions around the console of the image processing apparatus 100, and is comprised of a combination of an LCD (liquid crystal display device), LEDs (light-emitting diodes), tone generation element, and the like. Some functions of the indication unit 120 are placed within an optical viewfinder 138.

Of the indication contents of the indication unit 120, those indicated on an LCD or the like include, e.g., a single shot/continuous shot indication, self-timer indication, compression ratio indication, recording pixel count indication, recording image count indication, remaining photographable image count indication, shutter speed indication, aperture value indication, exposure correction indication, flash indication, red-eye suppression indication, macro-image sensing indication, buzzer setting indication, timepiece battery remaining capacity indication, error indication, information indication using numerals having a plurality of digits, attached/detached state indication of recording media 200a and 200b, communication I/F operation indication, date/time indication, indication that indicates a connection state with an external computer, and the like.

Of the indication contents of the indication unit 120, those indicated within the optical viewfinder 138 include, e.g., an in-focus indication, image sensing

ready indication, camera shake alert indication, flash
charging indication, flash charging completion
indication, shutter speed indication, aperture value
indication, exposure correction indication, recording
5 medium write access indication, and the like.

Furthermore, of the indication contents of the
indication unit 120, those indicated by LEDs or the like
include, e.g., in-focus indication, image sensing ready
indication, camera shake alert indication, flash
10 charging indication, flash charging completion
indication, recording medium write access indication,
macro-image sensing setting notification indication,
secondary battery charged state indication, and the like.

Of the indication contents of the indication unit
15 120, those to be indicated by lamps include, e.g., a
self-timer notification lamp, and the like. The
self-timer notification lamp may be commonly used as
that for emitting AF auxiliary light.

Reference numeral 121 denotes a rewritable
20 nonvolatile memory, which uses, e.g., an EEPROM
(electrically erasable and programmable read only
memory).

Reference numerals 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127,
and 128 denote operation means for inputting various
25 operation instructions of the system control circuit 118.
These operation means are constructed by one or a

plurality of combinations of a switch, a dial, a touch panel, a pointer using line of sight detection, a voice recognition device, and the like.

Examples of these operation means 122 to 128 will
5 be explained below.

Reference numeral 122 denotes a mode dial switch, which can select various function mode positions such as power OFF, automatic image sensing mode, image sensing mode, panoramic image sensing mode, playback mode,
10 multi-frame playback/erase mode, PC (personal computer connection mode, and the like.

Reference numeral 123 denotes a first shutter switch, which is turned at the half stroke position of a shutter button (not shown), and instructs start of an AF
15 (auto focus) process, AE (auto exposure) process, AWB (auto white balance) process, EF (flash pre-emission) process, and the like.

Reference numeral 124 denotes a second shutter switch, which is turned on upon completion of operation
20 of the shutter button (not shown), and instructs start of a series of processes including an exposure process for writing a signal read out from the image sensing element 103 as image data in the memory 111 via the A/D converter 104 and memory control circuit 107, a
25 development process using computation results in the image processing circuit 106 and memory control circuit

107, and a recording process for reading out image data
from the memory 111, compressing the readout data by the
compression/expansion circuit 112, and writing the
compressed image data in the recording medium 200a or
5 200b.

Reference numeral 125 denotes selection/change
switch that can select and change various functions upon
executing image sensing and playback in, e.g., the
panoramic mode.

10 Reference numeral 126 denotes a
determination/execution switch which can determine and
execute various functions upon executing image sensing
and playback in, e.g., the panoramic mode.

Reference numeral 127 denotes a console including
15 various buttons, touch panel, and the like, which
include a menu button, set button, macro button,
multi-frame playback new page button, flash setting
button, single shot/continuous shot/self-timer switch
button, menu movement + (plus) button, menu movement
20 - (minus) button, playback image movement + (plus)
button, playback image movement - (minus) button, sensed
image quality selection button, exposure correction
button, date/time setting button, image display ON/OFF
button for turning on/off the image display unit 110,
25 quick review ON/OFF setting button for setting a quick
review function of automatically playing back sensed

image data on the image display unit 110 immediately after image sensing, and the like.

Reference numeral 128 denotes a compression mode switch which is used for selecting the compression ratio of JPEG compression or selecting a CCDRAW mode for directly recording a signal output from the image sensing element 103 and converted into a digital signal on the recording medium 200a or 200b (to be described later).

10 The JPEG compression mode includes, e.g., a normal mode and fine mode. In the JPEG compression mode, image data, which is read out from the image sensing element 103 and is written in the memory 111 via the A/D converter 104, image processing circuit 106, and memory control circuit 107, is read out, and is compressed at the selected compression ratio by the compression/expansion circuit 112. After that, the compressed image data is recorded on the recording medium 200a or 200b.

20 In the CCDRAW mode, image data, which is directly read out in units of lines in correspondence with the pixel formats of color filters of the image sensing element 103, and is written in the memory 111 via the A/D converter 104 and memory control circuit 107, is read out, and is recorded on the recording medium 200a or 200b.

Reference numeral 129 denotes a power supply control means, which is comprised of a battery detection circuit, a DC-DC converter, a switch circuit for switching a block to be energized, and the like. The power supply control means 129 detects the presence/absence, type, and remaining battery amount of a battery attached, controls the DC-DC converter on the basis of such detection results and an instruction from the system control circuit 118, and supplies a required voltage to the respective units including the recording media 200a and 200b for a required period of time.

Reference numerals 130 and 131 denote connectors for connecting the power supply means 129 and a power supply 132 (to be described below). Reference numeral 132 denotes the power supply, which includes a primary battery such as an alkali battery, lithium battery, or the like, a secondary battery such as an NiCd battery, NiMH battery, Li Battery, or the like, an AC adapter, and the like. Reference numerals 133 and 134 denote interfaces (I/Fs) with recording media 200a and 200b (to be described later); and 135 and 136, connectors for connecting the interfaces (I/Fs) with the recording media 200a and 200b (to be described later).

Reference numeral 137 denotes a recording medium
25 attachment/detachment detection means for detecting
whether or not the recording medium 200a or 200b (to be

described later) is attached to the connector 135 or 136.
The recording medium attachment/detachment detection
means 137 can also detect whether or not one of devices
other than the recording medium 200a or 200b (to be
5 described later) such as various communication cards,
and the like (to be described later) is attached. Note
that this embodiment has two sets of interfaces and
connectors that receive the recording media 200a and
200b. Of course, the number of sets of interfaces and
10 connectors that receive the recording media is not
particularly limited.

Also, combinations of interfaces and connectors of
different standards may be used. As the interface and
connector, those complying with the standards of a
15 PCMCIA card, CF (compact flash) card, and the like may
be used.

Furthermore, when the interfaces 133 and 134, and
connectors 135 and 136 use those complying with the
standards of a PCMCIA card, CF (compact flash) card, and
20 the like, various communication cards such as a LAN card,
modem card, USB card, IEEE1394 card, P1284 card, SCSI
card, PHS, and the like are connected thereto, image
data and associated management information can be
transferred between the image processing apparatus 100
25 and an external computer or its peripheral devices such
as a printer and the like.

Reference numeral 150 denotes the protection means serving as a barrier which covers an image sensing unit S including the photographing lens 101 of the image processing apparatus 100 to protect it from

5 contamination and damages. Reference numeral 138 denotes the optical viewfinder, which allows image sensing using the optical viewfinder alone without using the electronic viewfinder function implemented by the image display unit 110. In the optical viewfinder 138, some

10 functions of the indication unit 120, e.g., an in-focus indication, camera shake alert indication, flash charging indication, shutter speed indication, aperture value indication, exposure correction indication, and the like are placed.

15 Reference numeral 139 denotes a communication means having various communication functions such as RS232C, USB, IEEE1394, P1284, SCSI, modem, LAN, radio communication, and the like. Reference numeral 140 denotes a connector or antenna, which serves as a

20 connector when the image processing apparatus 100 is connected to another device using the communication means 139, or serves as an antenna in case of radio communications.

Reference numerals 200a and 200b denote the

25 recording media such as a memory card, hard disk, or the like. The recording media 200a and 200b respectively

comprise recording units 201a and 201b each comprised of
a semiconductor memory, magnetic disk, or the like,
interfaces (I/Fs) 202a and 202b with the image
processing apparatus 100, and connectors 203a and 203b
5 for connecting the image processing apparatus 100.

The operation of the image processing apparatus
100 according to this embodiment with the aforementioned
arrangement will be explained below using Figs. 2 to 8.

Figs. 2 to 4 are flow charts showing the main
10 routine of the image processing apparatus 100 according
to this embodiment.

The operation will be explained first using
Figs. 2 to 4.

Upon power ON after battery exchange or the like,
15 the system control circuit 118 initializes flags,
control variables, and the like and also initializes
(initially sets up) the respective units of the image
processing apparatus 100 in step S201 in Fig. 2. In
step S202, the system control circuit 118 checks the
20 setting position of the mode dial switch 122. If the
mode dial switch 122 is set at a power OFF position, the
system control circuit 118 executes a predetermined
process in step S213. More specifically, the system
control circuit 118 changes the indications of the
25 respective indication units to an end state, protects
the image sensing unit S by closing the barrier of the

protection means 150, records required parameters and setting values including flags, control variables, and the like, and the setting mode in the nonvolatile memory 121, cuts off unnecessary power supply to the respective
5 units of the image processing apparatus 100 including the image display unit 110 by the power supply control means 129, and so forth. After that, the flow returns to step S202.

10 If it is determined in step S202 that the mode dial switch 122 is set at any of other mode positions, the system control circuit 118 checks using the power supply control means 129 in step S203 if the remaining capacity and operation state of the power supply 132 comprising batteries and the like pose any problem in
15 the operation of the image processing apparatus 100. If any problem is found, a predetermined alert indication is made by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 120 in step S214, and the flow then returns to step S202.

20 If no problem is found in step S203, the system control circuit 118 checks in step S204 if the operation state of the recording medium 200a or 200b poses any problem in the operation of the image processing apparatus 100, in particular, recording/playback of
25 image data to/from the recording medium 200a or 200b. If any problem is found, a predetermined alert indication

is made by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 120 in step S214, and the flow then returns to step S202.

5 If no problem is found in step S204, various setting states of the image display apparatus 100 are indicated by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 120 in step S205. When the image display of the image display unit 110 is ON, various setting states of the image display apparatus 100 are indicated
10 by means of an image or voice also using the image display unit 110.

The setting position of the mode dial switch 122 is then checked in step S206. If the mode dial switch 122 is set at an image sensing mode position, a
15 predetermined image sensing process is executed in step S215, and the flow then returns to step S202. If the mode dial switch 122 is set at any of other mode positions, the system control circuit 118 executes a process corresponding to the selected (set) mode in step
20 S216, and the flow returns to step S202. Furthermore, if the mode dial switch 122 is set at a panoramic mode position, the system control circuit 118 displays a panoramic mode selection window on the image display unit 110 in step S207.

25 The user of the image processing apparatus 100 can select an arbitrary one of a plurality of panoramic

image sensing modes by observing the panoramic mode selection window displayed on the image display unit 110.

The panoramic image sensing modes include a 2×2 panoramic mode, horizontal panoramic mode, vertical panoramic mode, and the like. In these modes, by combining a plurality of sensed images, a panoramic image, which is extended two-dimensionally, horizontally, or vertically, can be obtained.

A series of sensed images are appended with information indicating their positional relationship, and can be combined to generate a signal panoramic image by the image processing apparatus 100 itself or after they are transferred to, e.g., a computer or the like.

Fig. 9 shows an example of the panoramic mode selection window. Referring to Fig. 9, reference numeral 901 denotes an icon for selecting the 2×2 panoramic mode used for sensing a two-dimensional panoramic image; 902, an icon for selecting the horizontal panoramic mode used for sensing a horizontal panoramic image; and 903, an icon for selecting a vertical panoramic mode used for sensing a vertical panoramic image.

The user of the image processing apparatus 100 can select a desired panoramic mode by the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key), and can determine that panoramic mode by the determination/execution switch 126 (e.g., [SET] key).

Referring back to Fig. 2, upon completion of the process in step S207, the type of panoramic mode selected by the selection/change switch 125 and determination/execution switch 126 is checked in step 5 S208. If the 2×2 panoramic mode is selected, the system control circuit 118 initially sets up the 2×2 panoramic mode in step S209; if the vertical panoramic mode is selected, the system control circuit 118 initially sets up the vertical panoramic mode in step 10 S210; or if the horizontal panoramic mode is selected, the system control circuit 118 initially sets up the horizontal panoramic mode in step S211. More specifically, the system control circuit 118 sets initial values and memory areas of flags, parameters, 15 and variables, reads out a display window serving as a user interface, and so forth in correspondence with the selected panoramic mode. After that, the system control circuit 118 displays a panoramic image sensing window corresponding to the selected mode on the image display 20 unit 110 in step S212, and then enters the process shown in Fig. 3.

Figs. 10A and 10B show examples of the horizontal panoramic mode image sensing window, Figs. 11A and 11B show examples of the vertical panoramic mode image 25 sensing window, and Figs. 12A and 12B show examples of the 2×2 panoramic mode image sensing window.

Fig. 10A shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing to the left.

Referring to Figs. 10A and 10B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region "1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, rightward image sensing (Fig. 10A) or leftward image sensing (Fig. 10B) can be desirably selected using the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key). The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button in desired one of the display window states shown in Figs. 10A and 10B.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the horizontal panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 126 (e.g., [SET] key).

Fig. 11A shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing downward.

Referring to Figs. 11A and 11B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region

"1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, upward image sensing (Fig. 11A) or downward image sensing (Fig. 11B) can be desirably selected using the
5 selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key). The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button in desired one of the display window states shown in Figs. 11A and 11B.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the
10 vertical panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 126 (e.g., [SET] key).

Fig. 12A shows an image sensing window for the first image upon creating a 2×2 panoramic window by two-dimensionally repeating image sensing of a total of
15 four images in the vertical and horizontal directions, and Fig. 12B shows an image sensing window for the second image.

Referring to Figs. 12A and 12B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., an
20 upper right region to sense the first one of panoramic images.

Upon completion of image sensing of the first image, the playback image of the sensed image is displayed on, e.g., the upper right region, and a
25 through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., the lower right region to sense the

second image. The image sensing region of the electronic viewfinder is switched in turn to the next region after each image sensing. However, image sensing may be started from an arbitrary region, or may be redone by
5 returning to the already sensed region. For this purpose, the image sensing region can be desirably shifted using the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] switch). The image sensing region to be re-sensed is determined and image sensing is executed by pressing the shutter button
10 in a display window state that selects a desired region. Note that the user can end image sensing in the 2×2 panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 126 (e.g., [SET] key).

Referring to Fig. 3, the system control circuit
15 118 initializes flags and variables set in its internal memory or the memory 119 in step S301. For example, the system control circuit 118 resets a panoramic image sensing start flag, sets a variable n and initializes it to $n = 1$ in step S302, and sets a variable m and
20 initializes it to $m = 1$ in step S303.

Note that the panoramic image sensing start flag is reset to indicate that no panoramic image sensing processes have been done. Also, the variable n indicates the position of the current image sensing region in
25 image sensing of each panoramic mode. The variable m is used for returning the image sensing region to the

immediately preceding region or canceling such return,
upon executing image sensing again in the horizontal and
vertical panoramic modes. An example of the method of
using these flag and variables will be explained later.

5 In step S304, the setting position of the mode
dial switch 122 is checked. If the mode dial switch 122
is set at any of mode positions other than the panoramic
mode, the system control circuit 118 ends image sensing
in the panoramic mode, and the flow returns to step S202
10 in Fig. 2. In this manner, the user of the image
processing apparatus 100 can end the panoramic mode
anytime he or she wants, and can select another mode.

 If the mode dial switch 122 is set at the
panoramic mode position, it is checked in step S305 if
15 end of the panoramic mode is selected. If end of the
panoramic mode is selected by pressing the
determination/execution switch 126 (e.g., [SET] key)
while the mode dial switch 122 is kept set at the
panoramic mode position, i.e., the display window keeps
20 displaying the corresponding panoramic image sensing
window, a panoramic mode end confirmation message is
displayed, and it is checked in step S314 if
confirmation of the end is selected. If confirmation of
end is selected, the flow returns to step S207 in
25 Fig. 2; otherwise, the flow returns to step S304.

5 If it is determined in step S305 that end of the panoramic mode is not selected, it is checked in step S306 if the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) has been pressed while the image display unit 110 keeps displaying the panoramic image sensing window. If the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) has been pressed, the system control circuit 118 discriminates the contents of the panoramic mode in step S307.

10 If the contents of the panoramic mode indicate the 2×2 panoramic mode, the system control circuit 118 sets the variable n to be $n = n + 1$ in step S308, and checks in step S309 if $n = 5$. If $n = 5$, the system control circuit 118 sets $n = n - 4$ in step S310 to select the first image sensing region. After that, the flow advances to step S311.

15 More specifically, every time the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) is pressed, the image sensing region of interest shifts to one of the four image sensing regions in the 2×2 panoramic mode. For example, 20 the image sensing region of interest shifts in the order of the upper right region, lower right region, lower left region, upper left region, upper right region, lower right region,....

25 On the other hand, if it is determined in step S306 that the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) has been pressed, the system control circuit 118 discriminates the contents of the panoramic mode in step S307.

key) is not pressed, the control skips steps S307 to S310, and advances to step S311.

On the other hand, if it is determined in step S307 that the contents of the panoramic mode indicate the horizontal or vertical panoramic mode, the status of the image sensing start flag is checked in step S315. If the image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., no images have been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes, the system control circuit 118 reverses the image sensing direction of the selected panoramic mode in step S316, and the flow then advances to step S311.

If it is determined in step S315 that the image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., the first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes, the system control circuit 118 computes $m = m \times (-1)$, the sign of which changes like -1, +1, -1, +1, ... in every computation in step S317, and also computes $n = n + m$ for the variable n , which changes like $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, ... in every computation in step S318. After that, the flow advances to step S311.

If $n \neq 5$ in step S309, the control skips step S310 and advances to step S311.

With this control, movement to the already sensed region (which is limited to the lastly sensed one) or

cancel that movement can be repetitively selected to sense an image again.

After panoramic image sensing of the n-th image region, the user presses the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the (n-1)-th and n-th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions. Then, the user temporarily releases (cancels) the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) to display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) once again to display the original quick review image on the n-th image region and a through image on the (n+1)-th image region, thus executing the next panoramic image sensing.

After panoramic image sensing of the n-th image region, upon pressing the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the (n-1)-th and n-th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions, if the user determines that image sensing must be redone, he or she temporarily releases the selection/change switch 125 (e.g., [+] key) to display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the shutter switch 123 in that window state to replace the image with the newly sensed image. Then, the user can execute the next panoramic image sensing.

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The system control circuit 118 selects the n-th image region in step S311, and checks in step S312 if the window layout must be changed (switched) in correspondence with the selected image region. If the window layout must be changed (switched) in correspondence with the selected image region, the system control circuit 118 switches and displays a new window layout in step S313, and then enters the process shown in Fig. 4.

10 On the other hand, if the window layout need not be changed (switched) in correspondence with the selected image region, the control skips step S313 and enters the process shown in Fig. 4. With this control, a window corresponding to the reversed image sensing direction, a window corresponding to the changed image sensing region, a window that has updated characters and images for comments, or the like can be displayed as needed.

20 Upon sensing the second and subsequent images, the image sensing regions that display already sensed images are set in a quick review display state, and the image sensing region selected for the next image sensing is set in a through display state, thus displaying a playback image of the already sensed image and the next image to be sensed to partially overlap each other. In

25

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this manner, the user of the image processing apparatus
100 can easily determine the next image sensing angle.

Referring to Fig. 4, the system control circuit
118 sets a through display state that displays sensed
5 image data in turn in step S401.

In through display, data, which have been written
in the image display memory 108 via the image sensing
element 103, A/D converter 104, image processing circuit
106, and memory control circuit 107, are displayed on
10 the aforementioned image sensing region of the image
display unit via the memory control circuit 107 and D/A
converter 109, thereby implementing an electronic
viewfinder function.

The system control circuit 108 checks in step S402
15 if the first shutter switch 123 has been pressed. If the
first shutter switch 123 has not been pressed, the flow
returns to step S304 in Fig. 3. On the other hand, if
the first shutter switch 123 has been pressed, the
system control circuit 118 sets the display state of the
20 image display unit 110 in a freeze display state in step
S403.

In freeze display, image data on the image display
memory 108 is inhibited from being rewritten via the
image sensing element 103, A/D converter 104, image
25 processing circuit 106, and memory control circuit 107,
and the latest written image data is displayed on the

above-mentioned image display region of the image display unit 110 via the memory control circuit 107 and D/A converter 109, thus displaying a frozen image on the electronic viewfinder.

5 In step S404, the system control circuit 118 executes distance measurement to adjust the focus of the photographing lens 101 on the object, and executes photometry to determine the aperture value and shutter speed. In photometry, the ON/OFF state of the electronic
10 flash 117 is set if necessary. The distance measurement/photometry process in step S404 will be explained later with reference to Fig. 5.

 Upon completion of the distance measurement/photometry process in step S404, the system
15 control circuit 118 sets the display state of the image display unit 110 in a through display state in step S405. Note that this through display state is the same operation state as that in step S401.

 The system control circuit 118 checks in step S406
20 if the second shutter switch 124 has been pressed. If the second shutter switch 124 has not been pressed, the control circuit 118 checks in step S417 if the first shutter switch 123 is canceled. If the first shutter switch 123 is canceled, the flow returns to step S406;
25 otherwise, the flow returns to step S304 in Fig. 3.

5 If it is determined in step S406 that the second shutter switch 124 has been pressed, the system control circuit 118 sets the display state of the image display unit 110 in a fixed-color display state in step S407. In
10 fixed-color display, in place of sensed image data, which has been written in the image display memory 108 via the image sensing element 103, A/D converter 104, image processing circuit 106, and memory control circuit 107, substitute fixed-color image data is displayed on
15 the image display unit 110 via the memory control circuit 107 and D/A converter 109, thus displaying a fixed-color image on the electronic viewfinder.

20 In step S408, the system control circuit 118 executes an image sensing process including an exposure process for writing sensed image data in the memory 111 via the image sensing element 103, A/D converter 104, image processing circuit 106, and memory control circuit 107 or directly from the A/D converter 104 via the memory control circuit 107, and a process for executing
25 various processes by reading out image data written in the memory 111 using the memory control circuit 107 and image processing circuit 106 if required. The image sensing process will be described in detail later with reference to Fig. 6.

30 In step S409, the system control circuit 118 executes a display image process for reading out image

data written in the memory 111 by the image sensing
process in step S408, and transferring the readout data
to the image display memory 108 via the memory control
circuit 107. The display image process will be explained
5 in detail later with reference to Fig. 7.

In step S410, the system control circuit 118 sets
the display state of the image display unit 110 in a
quick review display state. In quick review display,
image data, which has been transferred to the image
10 display memory 108 by the display image process in step
S409, is displayed on the above-mentioned image sensing
region of the image display unit 110 via the memory
control circuit 107 and D/A converter 109, thus
implementing an electronic viewfinder function that
15 automatically plays back the sensed image.

In step S411, the system control circuit 118
executes a compression process in which various image
processes are done using the memory control circuit 107
and image processing circuit 106 if required by reading
20 out sensed image data written in the memory 111, or an
image is compressed in correspondence with the selected
mode using the compression/expansion circuit 112. The
compression process will be explained in detail later
with reference to Fig. 8.

25 In step S412, the system control circuit 118
executes a recording process for writing image data in

the recording medium 200a or 200b such as a memory card, compact flash card, or the like via the interface 133 or 134 and the connector 135 or 136.

When the image display unit 110 is ON, a message
5 such as "BUSY" or the like that indicates that a write is in progress is displayed on the image display unit 110 during a write of image data on the recording medium 200a or 200b. Furthermore, the indication unit 120 makes a recording medium write access indication by flickering
10 an LED or the like in combination with the above message.

The system control circuit 118 continues quick review display on the image display unit 110 until the second shutter switch 124 is canceled. With this display, the user can carefully check the sensed image while
15 pressing the second shutter switch 124.

The system control circuit 118 checks in step S413 if the second shutter switch 124 is canceled, until it is actually canceled. If the second shutter switch 124 is canceled, the system control circuit 118 sets the
20 panoramic image sensing start flag in step S414 to indicate that the first image in a series of panoramic image sensing processes has already been sensed. In this manner, as has been described in step S315 in Fig. 3, the image sensing direction can be inhibited from being
25 reversed after the first image is sensed in the horizontal or vertical panoramic mode.

The system control circuit 118 sets the variable n to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing region in step S415, and resets the variable m to $m = 1$ in step S416. Then, the flow returns to step S304 in Fig. 3 to
5 repeat a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

In this fashion, after the control returns to step S304 in Fig. 3 upon canceling (releasing) the second shutter switch 124, the next image sensing region is selected in step S311. In step S313, the image sensing
10 regions which include the previous image sensing region and display the sensed images are set in a quick review display state and the next image sensing region is set in a through display state, so as to display the sensed images and an image to be sensed to overlap each other,
15 thus allowing the user to easily sense panoramic images.

Figs. 14A and 14B show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n -th image in the horizontal panoramic mode. Fig. 14A shows the image sensing window before sensing
20 the first image, and Fig. 14B shows the image sensing window upon canceling the second shutter switch 124 after the first image is sensed. Although not shown, before the second shutter switch 124 is canceled after the first image sensing, the first image sensing region
25 in Fig. 14A on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

5 Figs. 15A and 15B show examples of the image
sensing window before and after completion of sensing of
the n-th image in the vertical panoramic mode. Fig. 15A
shows the image sensing window before sensing the first
10 image, and Fig. 15B shows the image sensing window upon
canceling the second shutter switch 124 after the first
image is sensed. Although not shown, before the second
shutter 124 is canceled after the first image sensing,
the first image sensing region in Fig. 15A on the image
15 sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

Furthermore, Figs. 12A to 13B show examples of the
image sensing window before and after completion of
sensing of the n-th image.

15 Fig. 12A shows the image sensing window before the
first image is sensed. Fig. 12B shows the image sensing
window upon canceling the second shutter switch 124
after the first image is sensed, i.e., before the second
image is sensed.

20 Although not shown, before the second shutter
switch 124 is canceled after the first image sensing,
the first image sensing region in Fig. 12A on the image
sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

25 Fig. 13A shows the image sensing window upon
canceling the second shutter switch 124 after the second
image is sensed, i.e., before the third image is sensed,
and Fig. 13B shows the image sensing window upon

canceling the second shutter switch 124 after the third image is sensed, i.e., before the fourth image is sensed.

Although not shown, before the second shutter switch 124 is canceled after the n-th image sensing, the n-th image sensing region in Figs. 12A to 13B on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state. When the second shutter switch 124 is canceled, a through display of the (n+1)-th image sensing region as the next region is added.

Fig. 5 is a flow chart showing the flow of the operation of the distance measurement/photometry process in step S404 shown in Fig. 4 in detail.

The system control circuit 118 reads out a charge signal from the image sensing element 103, and the image processing circuit 106 sequentially reads sensed image data via the A/D converter 104 in step S501. Using the read image data, the image processing circuit 106 makes predetermined computations used in the TTL (Through The Lens) AE (auto exposure) process, EF (flash pre-emission) process, and AF (auto focus) process.

Note that the respective processes extract specific portions at required positions from all pixels, and use them in computations. In this manner, in the TTL AE, EF, and AF processes, optimal computations can be made in units of different modes, i.e., a

center-weighted mode, average mode, evaluation mode, and the like.

The system control circuit 118 checks using the computation results of the image processing circuit 106
5 in step S502 if the exposure value (AE) is appropriate (OK). If AE is inappropriate, the system control circuit 118 executes AE control in step S503. The system control circuit 118 checks using measurement data obtained by the AE control in step S504 if flash emission is
10 required. If flash emission is not required, the flow returns to step S501; otherwise, the system control circuit 118 sets a flash flag to charge the electronic flash 117 in step S505. Then, the flow returns to step S501.

15 On the other hand, if it is determined in step S502 that AE is appropriate, the system control circuit 118 stores measurement data and/or setting parameters in its internal memory or the memory 119. The system control circuit 118 checks using the computation results
20 of the image processing circuit 106 and measurement data obtained by the AE control in step S506 if the white balance (AWB) is appropriate (OK). If the white balance is inappropriate, the system control circuit 118 executes AWB by adjusting the color processing
25 parameters using the image processing circuit 106 in step S507, and the flow then returns to step S501.

On the other hand, if it is determined in step S506 that the white balance is appropriate, the system control circuit 118 stores measurement data and/or setting parameters in its internal memory or the memory 119. The system control circuit 118 checks using measurement data obtained by the AE control and AWB control in step S508 if a distance measurement result indicates in-focus. If the distance measurement result does not indicate in-focus, the system control circuit 118 executes AF control in step S509, and the flow returns to step S501. On the other hand, if it is determined in step S508 that the distance measurement result indicates in-focus, the system control circuit 118 stores measurement data and/or setting parameters in its internal memory or the memory 119, thus ending this processing operation (the processing operation in step S404 in Fig. 4).

Fig. 6 is a flow chart showing the flow of the image sensing process in step S408 in Fig. 4 in detail.

The system control circuit 118 opens the shutter 102 having the stop function using the exposure control means 113 in accordance with photometry data stored in its internal memory or the memory 119 in step S601, and starts exposure of the image sensing element 103 in step S602. The system control circuit 118 checks based on the flash flag in step S603 if the electronic flash 117 is

required. If the electronic flash 117 is required, the system control circuit 118 controls the electronic flash 117 to emit light in step S604, and the flow advances to step S605. If it is determined in step S603 that the
5 electronic flash 117 is not required, the control skips step S604 and advances to step S605.

The system control circuit 118 checks in step S605 if exposure of the image sensing element 103 is complete in accordance with the photometry data, until it is
10 actually complete. Upon completion of exposure of the image sensing element 103, the system control circuit 118 closes the shutter 102 in step S606, and reads a charge signal from the image sensing element 103 and writes sensed image data in the memory 111 via the A/D
15 converter 104, image processing circuit 106, and memory control circuit 107 or directly from the A/D converter 104 via the memory control circuit 107 in step S607. Upon completion of a series of processes, this processing operation (the processing operation in step
20 S408 in Fig. 4) ends.

Fig. 7 is a flow chart showing the flow of the display image process in step S409 shown in Fig. 4 in detail.

The system control circuit 118 checks in step S701
25 if a frame process is required in correspondence with the selected image sensing mode. If a frame process is

required, the system control circuit 118 reads out image data written in the memory 111 and executes vertical addition using the memory control circuit 107 and also the image processing circuit 106 if necessary in step
5 S702. Likewise, the system control circuit 118 executes a color process in step S703. After that, the system control circuit 118 writes the processed image data in the memory 111, and the flow advances to step S704.

On the other hand, if it is determined in step 701
10 that the frame process is not required, the control skips steps S702 and S703, and advances to step S704.

In step S704, the system control circuit 118 reads out image data from the memory 111, and transfers display image data to the image display memory 108 via
15 the memory control circuit 107.

Upon completion of a series of processes, this processing operation (the processing operation in step S409 in Fig. 4) ends.

Fig. 8 is a flow chart showing the flow of the
20 compression process in step S411 in Fig. 4 in detail.

In step S801, the system control circuit 118 executes a pixel squaring process for reading out sensed image data written in the memory 111, and converting the vertical-to-horizontal pixel ratio of the image sensing
25 element 103 to 1 : 1 by interpolation using the memory control circuit 107 and also the image processing

circuit 106 if necessary. The system control circuit 118 then writes the processed image data in the memory 111. In step S802, the system control circuit 118 reads out image data written in the memory 111 and executes image
5 compression corresponding to the selected mode using the compression/expansion circuit 112, then ending this processing operation (the processing operation in step S411 in Fig. 4).

Note that the number of types of selectable
10 panoramic modes on the panoramic mode selection window is 3, i.e., the 2×2 panoramic mode, horizontal panoramic mode, and vertical panoramic mode in this embodiment. However, the present invention is not limited to these specific modes, and one or a plurality
15 of types of an arbitrary number of different panoramic modes may be selectable.

Also, the display of the panoramic mode selection window shown in Fig. 9 is not limited to the one exemplified in this embodiment. Alternatively, a display
20 with an arbitrary layout or scheme using an image or voice may be made.

On the 2×2 panoramic mode image sensing window, a total of four images are two-dimensionally laid out in a 2×2 matrix. However, the present invention is not
25 limited to such matrix. For example, an arbitrary number of images such as a total of nine images, a total of 16

images, and the like may be laid out in a two-dimensional or three-dimensional matrix.

In the above embodiment, on the horizontal and vertical panoramic mode image sensing windows, two
5 images are continuously displayed. However, the present invention is not limited to such specific display, and an arbitrary number of images (e.g., three images, four images, and the like) may be one-dimensionally displayed.

The displays of the panoramic mode image sensing
10 windows shown in Figs. 10A to 15B are not limited to these examples, and displays with arbitrary layouts and schemes using images, voices, characters, symbols, and the like may be made.

In the above-mentioned embodiment, in the
15 horizontal and vertical panoramic modes, the image sensing direction is inhibited from being reversed after the first image is sensed. However, the present invention is not limited to this, and the image sensing direction may be reversed as needed. Also, the image
20 sensing direction may be changed in one of arbitrary directions including the right and left directions, up and down directions, or oblique directions. In the present invention, when a large number of image display regions can be simultaneously displayed by increasing
25 the display area of the image display unit 110, the image sensing direction can be changed in one of

arbitrary directions including the right and left directions, up and down directions, or oblique directions.

In the above embodiment, image sensing can be redone for only the immediately preceding sensed image in the horizontal and vertical panoramic modes. However, the present invention is not limited to this. For example, image sensing may be redone for an image sensed an arbitrary number of images before.

10 In the above embodiment, the next image display region for displaying an image to be sensed is set in the through display state, and that for displaying the already sensed image is set in the quick review display state, to display the playback image of the already
15 sensed image and the next image to be sensed so that their boundary regions partially overlap each other. However, the present invention is not limited to such specific scheme. For example, the images may be
20 displayed without making their boundary regions overlap each other.

In the explanatory views of the panoramic modes in Figs. 10A to 15B, for example, comment words "LIVE" and "FREEZE" are added within the image display regions. However, the actual image display unit 110 may or may
25 not display these comment words.

Note that the recording media 200a and 200b are not limited to memory cards such as PCMCIA cards, compact flash cards, or the like, hard disks, and the like, but may use micro DATs (digital audio tapes),
5 magnetooptical disks, optical disks such as CD-Rs, CD-WRs, or the like, phase change optical disks such as DVDs, and the like.

Also, the recording media 200a and 200b may use hybrid media that integrate memory cards, hard disks,
10 and the like. Furthermore, such hybrid media may include detachable media.

In the description of the embodiment, the recording media 200a and 200b are independent from the image processing apparatus 100 and are arbitrarily
15 connectable. One or both the recording media 200a and 200b may be permanently connected to the image processing apparatus 100.

An arbitrary number (one or a plurality) of image recording media 200a or 200b may be connectable to the
20 image processing apparatus 100.

In the above description, the recording media 200a and 200b are attached to the image processing apparatus. However, one or a combination of a plurality of recording media may be used.

25 As described in detail above, according to the image processing method and apparatus of the first

embodiment, the image sensing purposes are not limited,
which is very convenient.

Also, according to the storage medium of the first
embodiment, the aforementioned image processing
5 apparatus of the first embodiment can be smoothly
controlled.

(Second Embodiment)

Fig. 16 shows the arrangement of an image
processing apparatus according to the second embodiment
10 of the present invention.

Referring to Fig. 16, reference numeral 400
denotes an image processing apparatus.

Reference numeral 14 denotes an image sensing
element for converting an optical image into an
15 electrical signal; and 16, an A/D converter for
converting an analog signal output from the image
sensing element 14 into a digital signal.

Reference numeral 18 denotes a timing generation
circuit for supplying clock signals and control signals
20 to the image sensing element 14, the A/D converter 16,
and a D/A converter 26. The timing generation circuit 18
is controlled by a memory control circuit 22 and system
control circuit 50.

Reference numeral 20 denotes an image processing
25 circuit which performs predetermined pixel interpolation

and color conversion for data supplied from the A/D converter 16 or the memory control circuit 22.

The image processing circuit 20 makes a predetermined computation using sensed image data to
5 execute a TTL (Through The Lens) AF (auto focus) process, AE (auto exposure) process, and EF (flash pre-emission) process in which the system control circuit 50 controls an exposure control means 340 and distance measurement control means 342 on the basis of the obtained
10 computation result.

Furthermore, the image processing circuit 20 makes a predetermined computation using sensed image data, and executes a TTL AWB (auto white balance) process on the basis of the obtained computation result.

15 Reference numeral 22 denotes the memory control circuit, which controls the A/D converter 16, the timing generation circuit 18, the image processing circuit 20, an image display memory 24, the D/A converter 26, a memory 30, and a compression/expansion circuit 32.

20 Data output from the A/D converter 16 is written in the image display memory 24 or memory 30 via the image processing circuit 20 and memory control circuit 22 or directly via the memory control circuit 22.

Reference numeral 24 denotes the image display
25 memory; 26, the D/A converter; and 28, an image display unit comprising a TFT LCD or the like. Display image

data written in the image display memory 24 is displayed by the image display unit 28 via the D/A converter 26.

When sensed image data are displayed at image sensing timings using the image display unit 28, an
5 electronic viewfinder function can be implemented.

The image display unit 28 can arbitrarily turn on/off its display in response to an instruction from the system control circuit 50. When the display is turned off, consumption power of the image processing
10 apparatus 400 can be greatly reduced.

Reference numeral 30 denotes the memory for storing a still image and moving image. The memory 30 has a storage capacity large enough to store a predetermined number of still images or a moving image
15 for a predetermined period of time. With this arrangement, even in a continuous or panoramic image sensing mode for continuously sensing a plurality of still images, many images can be written in the memory 30 at high speed. Also, the memory 30 can be used as a
20 work area of the system control circuit 50.

Reference numeral 32 denotes the compression/expansion circuit for compressing/expanding image data by adaptive discrete cosine transformation (ADCT) or the like. The compression/expansion circuit 32
25 reads an image stored in the memory 30, compresses or

expands it, and writes the processed data in the memory
30.

Reference numeral 48 denotes an electronic flash
which has a function of projecting AF auxiliary light
5 and the flash light control function.

The exposure control means 340 and distance
measurement control means 342 are controlled using TTL,
and the system control circuit 50 controls the exposure
control means 340 and distance measurement control means
10 342 on the basis of the computation result of the image
processing circuit 20 using sensed image data.

Reference numeral 50 denotes the system control
circuit for controlling the overall image processing
apparatus 400; and 52, a memory for storing constants,
15 variables, programs, and the like for operations of the
system control circuit 50.

Reference numeral 54 denotes an indication unit
which includes a liquid crystal display device,
loudspeaker, and the like, and indicates operation
20 states, messages, and the like using characters, images,
voices, and the like in accordance with execution of a
program by the system control circuit 50. The indication
unit 54 is placed at one or a plurality of easy-to-see
positions around the console of the image processing
25 apparatus 400, and is comprised of a combination of an
LCD, LEDs, tone generation element, and the like.

Some functions of the indication unit 54 are placed within an optical viewfinder 404.

Of the indication contents of the indication unit 54, those indicated on an LCD or the like include, e.g.,
5 a single shot/continuous shot indication, self-timer indication, compression ratio indication, recording pixel count indication, recording image count indication, remaining photographable image count indication, shutter speed indication, aperture value indication, exposure
10 correction indication, flash indication, red-eye suppression indication, macro-image sensing indication, buzzer setting indication, timepiece battery remaining capacity indication, error indication, information indication using a plurality of digits of numerals,
15 attached/detached state indication of recording media 500 and 510, attached/detached state indication of a lens unit 300, communication I/F operation indication, date/time indication, indication that indicates a connection state with an external computer, and the like.

20 Of the indication contents of the indication unit 54, those indicated within the optical viewfinder 404 include, e.g., an in-focus indication, image sensing ready indication, camera shake alert indication, flash charging indication, flash charging completion
25 indication, shutter speed indication, aperture value

indication, exposure correction indication, recording medium write access indication, and the like.

Furthermore, of the indication contents of the indication unit 54, those indicated by LEDs or the like include, e.g., in-focus indication, image sensing ready indication, camera shake alert indication, flash charging indication, flash charging completion indication, recording medium write access indication, macro-image sensing setting notification indication, secondary battery charged state indication, and the like.

Of the indication contents of the indication unit 54, those to be indicated by lamps include, e.g., a self-timer notification lamp, and the like. The self-timer notification lamp may be commonly used as that for emitting AF auxiliary light.

Reference numeral 56 denotes an electrically erasable/recordable nonvolatile memory, which uses, e.g., an EEPROM.

Reference numerals 60, 62, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74, and 76 denote operation means for inputting various operation instructions of the system control circuit 50. These operation means are constructed by one or a plurality of combinations of a switch, a dial, a touch panel, a pointer using line of sight detection, a voice recognition device, and the like.

These operation means will be explained in detail below.

Reference numeral 60 denotes a mode dial switch, which can switch various function modes such as power
5 OFF, an automatic image sensing mode, image sensing mode, panoramic image sensing mode, playback mode, multi-frame playback/erase mode, PC connection mode, and the like.

Reference numeral 62 denotes a shutter switch SW1, which is turned on in the middle of operation of a
10 shutter button (not shown), and instructs start of an AF (auto focus) process, AE (auto exposure) process, AWB (auto white balance) process, EF (flash pre-emission) process, and the like.

Reference numeral 64 denotes a shutter switch SW2, which is turned on upon completion of operation of the
15 shutter button (not shown), and instructs start of a series of processes including an exposure process for writing a signal read out from the image sensing element 14 as image data in the memory 30 via the A/D converter
20 16 and memory control circuit 22, a development process using computation results in the image processing circuit 20 and memory control circuit 22, and a recording process for reading out image data from the memory 30, compressing the readout data by the
25 compression/expansion circuit 32, and writing the compressed image data in the recording medium 500 or 510.

Reference numeral 66 denotes a selection/change switch which can select and change various functions upon executing image sensing and playback in a panoramic mode or the like.

- 5 Reference numeral 68 denotes a determination/execution switch which can determine and execute various functions upon executing image sensing and playback in a panoramic mode or the like.

- Reference numeral 70 denotes a console including
- 10 various buttons, touch panel, and the like, which include a menu button, set button, macro button, multi-frame playback new page button, flash setting button, single shot/continuous shot/self-timer switch button, menu movement + (plus) button, menu movement
- 15 - (minus) button, playback image movement + (plus) button, playback image movement - (minus) button, sensed image quality selection button, exposure correction button, date/time setting button, image display ON/OFF button for turning on/off the image display unit 28,
- 20 quick review ON/OFF button for setting a quick review function of automatically playing back sensed image data on the image display unit 28 immediately after image sensing, and the like.

- Reference numeral 72 denotes a compression mode
- 25 switch, which is used for selecting a compression ratio of JPEG compression or selecting a CCDRAW mode for

directly recording a signal output from the image sensing element and converted into a digital signal on a recording medium.

The JPEG compression mode includes, e.g., a normal mode and fine mode..

In the JPEG compression mode, image data, which is read out from the image sensing element 14 and is written in the memory 30 via the A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22, is read out, and is compressed at the selected compression ratio by the compression/expansion circuit 32. After that, the compressed image data is recorded on the recording medium 500 or 510.

In the CCDRAW mode, image data, which is directly read out in units of lines in correspondence with the pixel formats of color filters of the image sensing element 14, and is written in the memory 30 via the A/D converter 16 and memory control circuit 22, is read out, and is recorded on the recording medium 500 or 510.

Reference numerals 74 and 76 denote zoom switches which zoom a photographing lens 310 via a zoom control means 344 of the lens unit 300. Note that the switch 74 is a zoom switch WIDE used for zooming the lens in the wide-angle direction, and the switch 76 is a zoom switch TELE used for zooming the lens in the telephoto direction. The switches 74 and 76 may be integrated.

Reference numeral 80 denotes a power supply control means, which is comprised of a battery detection circuit, a DC-DC converter, a switch circuit for switching a block to be energized, and the like. The
5 power supply control means 80 detects the presence/absence, type, and remaining battery amount of a battery attached, controls the DC-DC converter on the basis of such detection results and an instruction from the system control circuit 50, and supplies a required
10 voltage to the respective units including the recording medium for a required period of time.

Reference numerals 82 and 84 denote connectors; and 86, a power supply means including a primary battery such as an alkali battery, lithium battery, or the like,
15 a secondary battery such as an NiCd battery, NiMH battery, Li Battery, or the like, an AC adapter, and the like.

Reference numerals 90 and 94 denote interfaces with recording media such as a memory card, hard disk,
20 and the like; 92 and 96, connectors for connecting the recording media such as a memory card, hard disk, and the like; and 98, a recording medium attachment/detachment detection means for detecting whether or not the recording medium 500 or 510 is
25 attached to the connector 92 and/or the connector 96.

Note that this embodiment has two sets of interfaces and connectors that receive the recording media. Of course, the number of sets of interfaces and connectors that receive the recording media is not particularly limited. Also, combinations of interfaces and connectors of different standards may be used.

As the interface and connector, those complying with the standards of a PCMCIA card, CF (compact flash) card, and the like may be used.

Furthermore, when the interfaces 90 and 94, and connectors 92 and 96 use those complying with the standards of a PCMCIA card, CF (compact flash) card, and the like, various communication cards such as a LAN card, modem card, USB card, IEEE1394 card, P1284 card, SCSI card, PHS, and the like are connected thereto, image data and associated management information can be transferred between the image processing apparatus 400 and an external computer or its peripheral devices such as a printer and the like.

Reference numeral 404 denotes the optical viewfinder, which allows image sensing using the optical viewfinder alone without using the electronic viewfinder function implemented by the image display unit 28. In the optical viewfinder 404, some functions of the indication unit 54, e.g., an in-focus indication, camera shake alert indication, flash charging indication,

shutter speed indication, aperture value indication, exposure correction indication, and the like are placed.

Reference numeral 410 denotes a communication means having various communication functions such as
5 RS232C, USB, IEEE1394, P1284, SCSI, modem, LAN, radio communication, and the like.

Reference numeral 412 denotes a connector or antenna (in case of a radio communication), which connects the image processing apparatus 400 to another
10 device using the communication means 410.

Reference numeral 420 denotes an interface for connecting the image processing apparatus 400 to the lens unit 300 in a lens mount 406; 422, a connector for electrically connecting the image processing apparatus
15 400 to the lens unit 300; and 424, a lens attachment/detachment detection means for detecting whether or not the lens unit 300 is attached to the lens mount 406 and/or the connector 422.

The connector 422 transfers control signals, status signals, data signals, and the like between the
20 image processing apparatus 400 and lens unit 300, and also has a function of supplying currents of various voltages. Also, the connector 422 may have an arrangement that realizes optical communications, voice
25 communications, or the like in place of electrical communications.

Reference numeral 500 denotes the recording medium such as a memory card, hard disk, or the like. The recording medium 500 comprises a recording unit 502 comprised of a semiconductor memory, magnetic disk, or the like, an interface 504 with the image processing apparatus 400, and a connector 506 for connecting the image processing apparatus 400.

Reference numeral 510 denotes the recording medium such as a memory card, hard disk, or the like. The recording medium 510 comprises a recording unit 512 comprised of a semiconductor memory, magnetic disk, or the like, an interface 514 with the image processing apparatus 400, and a connector 516 for connecting the image processing apparatus 400.

Reference numeral 300 denotes the exchangeable lens type lens unit.

Reference numeral 306 denotes a lens mount for mechanically coupling the lens unit 300 to the image processing apparatus 400. The lens mount 306 includes various functions of electrically connecting the lens unit 300 to the image processing apparatus 400.

Reference numeral 310 denotes the photographing lens; and 312, a shutter with a stop function.

Reference numeral 320 denotes an interface for connecting the lens unit 300 to the image processing apparatus 400 in the lens mount 306; and 322, a

connector for electrically connecting the lens unit 300 to the image processing apparatus 400.

5 The connector 322 transfers control signals, status signals, data signals, and the like between the image processing apparatus 400 and lens unit 300, and also has a function of supplying currents of various voltages. Also, the connector 322 may have an arrangement that realizes optical communications, voice communications, or the like in place of electrical
10 communications.

Reference numeral 340 denotes the exposure control means for controlling the shutter 312 with the stop function. The exposure control means 340 also has a flash light control function in cooperation with an
15 electronic flash 48.

Reference numeral 342 denotes the distance measurement control means for controlling focusing of the photographing lens 310; and 344, the zoom control means for controlling zooming of the photographing lens
20 310.

Reference numeral 350 denotes a lens system control circuit for controlling the overall lens unit 300. The lens system control circuit 350 has a function of a memory for storing constants, variables, programs, and the like for operations, and a function of a
25 nonvolatile memory for holding identification

information such as a number unique to the lens unit 300,
management information, function information such as a
full-open aperture value, minimum aperture value, focal
length, and the like, the current and previous setting
5 values, and the like.

The operation of the second embodiment will be
explained below with reference to Figs. 17, 18, 19, 20,
and 21, and Figs. 5, 6, 7, and 8 common to the first
embodiment.

10 Figs. 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 are flow charts
showing the main routine of the image processing
apparatus 400 of this embodiment.

The operation of the image processing apparatus
400 will be described with the aid of Figs. 17, 18, 19,
15 20, and 21.

Upon power ON after battery exchange or the like,
the system control circuit 50 initializes flags, control
variables, and the like, and initializes the respective
units of the image processing apparatus 400 (step S101).

20 The system control circuit 50 checks the setting
position of the mode dial 60. If the mode dial 60 is set
at a power OFF position (step S102), the system control
circuit 50 executes a predetermined end process (step
S103). More specifically, the system control circuit 50
25 changes the indications of the respective indication
units to an end state, protects an image sensing unit by

closing a barrier if the lens unit 300 comprises the barrier or the like serving as a protection means, records required parameters and setting values including flags, control variables, and the like, and the setting
5 mode in the nonvolatile memory 56, cuts off unnecessary power supply to the respective units of the image processing apparatus 400 including the image display unit 28 by the power supply control means 80, and so forth. After that, the flow returns to step S102.

10 If the mode dial 60 is set at any of other mode positions (step S102), the system control circuit 50 checks using the power supply control means 80 if the remaining capacity and operation state of the power supply means 86 comprising batteries and the like pose
15 any problem in the operation of the image processing apparatus 400 (step S104). If any problem is found, a predetermined alert indication is made by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S106), and the flow then returns to step S102.

20 When the image display of the image display unit 28 is ON, a predetermined alert display is made by means of an image or voice also using the image display unit 28.

If no problem is found in the power supply means
25 86 (step S104), the system control circuit 50 checks if the operation state of the recording medium 500 or 510

poses any problem in the operation of the image processing apparatus 400, in particular, recording/playback of image data to/from the recording medium (step S105). If any problem is found, a

- 5 predetermined alert indication is made by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S106), and the flow then returns to step S102.

- When the image display of the image display unit 28 is ON, a predetermined alert display is made by means
10 of an image or voice also using the image display unit 28.

- If no problem is found in the operation state of the recording medium 500 or 510 (step S105), various setting states of the image display apparatus 400 are
15 indicated by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S107). When the image display of the image display unit 28 is ON, various setting states of the image display apparatus 400 are indicated by means of an image or voice also using the image
20 display unit 28.

- On the other hand, if the mode dial 60 is set at an image sensing mode position (step S108), a predetermined image sensing process is executed (step S109). Upon completion of the process, the flow returns
25 to step S102.

If the mode dial 60 is set at any of other mode positions (step S108), the system control circuit 50 executes a process corresponding to the selected mode (step S110). Upon completion of the process, the flow
5 returns to step S102.

If the mode dial 60 is set at a panoramic mode position (step S108), the system control circuit 50 checks if the zoom position of the photographing lens 310 is a predetermined home position (step S121). If the
10 photographing lens is not located at the home position, the system control circuit 50 moves the zoom position to the home position (step S122).

Also, when the photographing lens 310 uses a selectable lens that can select one of a plurality of
15 different focal lengths, the system control circuit 50 checks if that selectable lens of the photographing lens 310 is located on the predetermined home position side (step S121). If the selectable lens is not located on the home position side, the system control circuit 50
20 moves the selectable lens to the home position side (step S122).

As an example of the home position, in case of a zoom lens, the WIDE end as a focal length position on the wide-angle side suitable for panoramic image sensing
25 can be used.

In case of a focal length selectable lens, a lens with a focal length on the WIDE side as that on the wide-angle end suitable for panoramic image sensing may be selected.

5 The present invention is not limited to such specific example, and any focal length may be set at a home position as long as it is suitable for panoramic image sensing.

10 The system control circuit 50 displays a panoramic mode selection window on the image display unit (step S111).

15 The user of the image processing apparatus 400 can select an arbitrary one of a plurality of panoramic image sensing modes by observing the panoramic mode selection window displayed on the image display unit 28.

20 The panoramic image sensing modes include a 2×2 panoramic mode, horizontal panoramic mode, vertical panoramic mode, and the like. In these modes, by combining a plurality of sensed images, a panoramic image, which is extended two-dimensionally, horizontally, or vertically, can be obtained.

25 A series of sensed images are appended with information indicating their positional relationship, and can be combined to generate a signal panoramic image by the image processing apparatus 400 itself or after they are transferred to, e.g., a computer or the like.

Note that an example of the panoramic mode selection window is the same as that shown in Fig. 9 that has already been explained in the first embodiment.

Referring to Fig. 9, the left icon is used for
5 selecting the 2×2 panoramic mode for sensing a two-dimensional panoramic image, the central icon is used for selecting the horizontal panoramic mode for sensing a horizontal panoramic image, and the right icon is used for selecting a vertical panoramic mode for
10 sensing a vertical panoramic image.

The user of the image processing apparatus 400 can select a desired panoramic mode by the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key), and can determine that panoramic mode by the determination/execution switch 68
15 (e.g., [SET] key).

When the panoramic mode is selected using the selection/change switch 66 and determination/execution switch 68, the system control circuit 50 sets initial values and memory areas of flags, parameters, and
20 variables, reads out a display window serving as a user interface, and so forth in a 2×2 panoramic mode initial setup process (step S113), a vertical panoramic mode initial setup process (step S114), or a horizontal panoramic mode initial setup process (step S115) in
25 correspondence with the selected panoramic mode (step S112), and displays a panoramic image sensing window

corresponding to the selected mode on the image display unit 28 (step S116). The flow then advances to step S131.

Note that Figs. 10A and 10B show examples of the horizontal panoramic mode image sensing window,

5 Figs. 11A and 11B show examples of the vertical panoramic mode image sensing window, and Figs. 12A and 12B show examples of the 2×2 panoramic mode image sensing window, as in the description of the first embodiment.

10 Fig. 10A shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing to the left.

15 Referring to Figs. 10A and 10B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region "1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, rightward image sensing (Fig. 10A) or leftward
20 image sensing (Fig. 10B) can be desirably selected using the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key).

The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button in desired one of the display window states shown in
25 Figs. 10A and 10B.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the horizontal panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

Fig. 11A shows an image sensing window that
5 creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing downward.

Referring to Figs. 11A and 11B, a through image
10 from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region "1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, upward image sensing (Fig. 11A) or downward image sensing (Fig. 11B) can be desirably selected using the
15 selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key).

The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button in desired one of the display window states shown in Figs. 11A and 11B.

20 Note that the user can end image sensing in the vertical panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

Fig. 12A shows an image sensing window for the first image upon creating a 2×2 panoramic window by
25 two-dimensionally repeating image sensing of a total of four images in the vertical and horizontal directions,

and Fig. 12B shows an image sensing window for the second image.

Referring to Figs. 12A and 12B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., an upper right region to sense the first one of panoramic images.

Upon completion of image sensing of the first image, the playback image of the sensed image is displayed on, e.g., the upper right region, and a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., the lower right region to sense the second image.

The image sensing region of the electronic viewfinder is switched in turn to the next region after each image sensing. However, image sensing may be started from an arbitrary region, or may be redone by returning to the already sensed region. For this purpose, the image sensing region can be desirably shifted using the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] switch).

The image sensing region to be re-sensed is determined and image sensing is executed by pressing the shutter button in a display window state that selects a desired region.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the 2 × 2 panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

5 The system control circuit 50 initializes flags and variables set in its internal memory or the memory 52. For example, the system control circuit 50 resets a panoramic image sensing start flag (step S131), sets variables m and n, and initializes them to m = 1 and n = 1, respectively (steps S133 and S132).

Note that the panoramic image sensing start flag is reset to indicate that no panoramic image sensing processes have been done.

10 Also, the variable n indicates the position of the current image sensing region in image sensing of each panoramic mode.

15 The variable m is used for returning the image sensing region of interest to the immediately preceding region or canceling such return, upon executing image sensing again in the horizontal and vertical panoramic modes.

An example of the method of using these flag and variables will be explained later.

20 If the mode dial 60 is set at any of mode positions other than the panoramic mode (step S134), the system control circuit 50 ends image sensing in the panoramic mode, and the flow returns to step S102. In this manner, the user of the image processing apparatus
25 400 can end the panoramic mode anytime he or she wants, and can select another mode.

series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S162),
the system control circuit 50 makes a predetermined
alert display by means of an image or voice using the
indication unit 54 and/or the image display unit 28
5 (step S164). The flow advances to step S137 without
executing any zoom operation.

With this control, an image which is unsuitable
for panoramic synthesis can be prevented from being
sensed by zoom operation of the photographing lens 310
10 during a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

If the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key)
has been pressed while the image display unit 28
displays one of the above-mentioned panoramic image
sensing windows (step S137), the system control circuit
15 50 executes a predetermined process in correspondence
with the setups of the panoramic mode (step S138).

If the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key)
is not pressed (step S137), the flow advances to step
S146.

20 If the 2×2 panoramic mode is selected (step
S138), the system control circuit 50 sets the variable n
to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing region
(step S139). If $n = 5$ (step S140), the first image
sensing region is selected by setting $n = n - 4$ (step
25 S141). After that, the flow advances to step S146.

More specifically, every time the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) is pressed, the image sensing region of interest shifts to one of the four image sensing regions in the 2×2 panoramic mode. For example, 5 the image sensing region of interest shifts in the order of the upper right region, lower right region, lower left region, upper left region, upper right region, lower right region,....

On the other hand, if the horizontal or vertical 10 panoramic mode is selected (step S138), and if the panoramic image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., if the first image is not sensed yet in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S142), the system control circuit 50 reverses the image sensing 15 direction of the selected panoramic mode (step S143). After that, the flow advances to step S146.

Note that the image sensing direction can be repetitively reversed before the first image is sensed.

Figs. 10A and 10B that have already been described 20 show examples of an image sensing direction reverse window in the horizontal panoramic mode.

Fig. 10A shows a window upon repeating image sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows a window upon repeating image sensing to the left.

Figs. 11A and 11B that have already been described show examples of an image sensing direction reverse window in the vertical panoramic mode.

Fig. 11A shows a window upon repeating image sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows a window upon repeating image sensing downward.

On the other hand, if the horizontal or vertical panoramic mode is selected (step S138) and if the panoramic image sensing start flag is set, i.e., if the first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S142), the system control circuit 50 computes $m = m \times (-1)$, the sign of which changes like -1, +1, -1, +1, ... in every computation (step S144), and also computes $n = n + m$ for the variable n , which changes like $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, ... in every computation (step S145). After that, the flow advances to step S146.

With this control, movement to the already sensed region (which is limited to the one sensed last) or cancel that movement can be repetitively selected to sense an image again.

After panoramic image sensing of the n -th image region, the user presses the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the $(n-1)$ -th and n -th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions. Then, the user temporarily releases

the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) once again to display the original quick review image on the n-th image region and a through image on the (n+1)-th image region, thus executing the next panoramic image sensing.

After panoramic image sensing of the n-th image region, upon pressing the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the (n-1)-th and n-th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions, if the user determines that image sensing must be redone, he or she temporarily releases the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the shutter switch SW2 in that window state to replace the image with the newly sensed image. Then, the user can execute the next panoramic image sensing.

The system control circuit 50 selects the n-th image region (step S146). If the window layout must be changed in correspondence with the selected image region (step S147), the system control circuit 50 switches and displays a new window layout (step S148), and the flow then advances to step S171.

In this fashion, a window corresponding to the reversed image sensing direction, as described above, a

window corresponding to the changed image sensing region,
a window that has updated characters and images for
comments, or the like can be displayed as needed.

Upon sensing the second and subsequent images, the
5 image sensing regions that display already sensed images
are set in a quick review display state, and the image
sensing region selected for the next image sensing is
set in a through display state, thus displaying a
10 playback image of the already sensed image and the next
image to be sensed to partially overlap each other. In
this manner, the user of the image processing apparatus
400 can easily determine the next image sensing angle.

The system control circuit 50 sets a through
display state in which sensed image data is displayed as
15 it is sensed (step S171), and the flow advances to step
S172.

In through display, data, which have been written
in the image display memory 24 via the image sensing
element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit
20 20, and memory control circuit 22, are displayed on the
aforementioned image sensing region of the image display
unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A
converter 26, thereby implementing an electronic
viewfinder function.

25 If the shutter switch SW1 is not pressed (step
S172), the flow returns to step S134.

If the shutter switch SW1 has been pressed (step S172), the system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a freeze display state (step S173), and the flow advances to step S174.

5 In freeze display, image data on the image display memory 24 is inhibited from being rewritten via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22, and the latest written image data is displayed on the
10 above-mentioned image display region of the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thus displaying a frozen image on the electronic viewfinder.

The system control circuit 50 executes distance
15 measurement to adjust the focus of the photographing lens 310 on the object, and executes photometry to determine the aperture value and shutter speed (step S174). In photometry, the electronic flash is set if necessary.

20 The details of the flow of this distance measurement/photometry process step S174 are the same as those in Fig. 5 that has already been described in the first embodiment, but will be explained again later using Fig. 5.

25 Upon completion of the distance measurement/photometry process step S174, the system

control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a through display state (step S175), and the flow advances to step S176. Note that the through display state in step S175 is the same as that
5 in step S171.

If the shutter switch SW2 is not pressed (step S176) and the shutter switch SW1 is canceled (step S177), the flow returns to step S134.

If the shutter switch SW2 has been pressed (step
10 S176), the system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a fixed-color display state (step S178), and the flow advances to step S179.

In fixed-color display, in place of sensed image
15 data, which has been written in the image display memory 24 via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22, substitute fixed-color image data is displayed on the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit
20 22 and D/A converter 26, thus displaying a fixed-color image on the electronic viewfinder.

The system control circuit 50 executes an image sensing process including an exposure process for writing sensed image data in the memory 30 via the image
25 sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22 or directly

from the A/D converter 16 via the memory control circuit 22, and a development process for executing various processes by reading out image data written in the memory 30 using the memory control circuit 22 and image processing circuit 20 if required (step S179).

The details of the flow of this image sensing process step S179 are the same as those in Fig. 6 that has already been described in the first embodiment, but will be explained again later using Fig. 6.

10 The system control circuit 50 executes a display image process for reading out image data written in the memory 30 by the image sensing process in step S179, and transferring the readout data to the image display memory 24 via the memory control circuit 22 (step S180).

15 The details of the flow of this display image process step S180 are the same as those in Fig. 7 that has already been described in the first embodiment, but will be explained again later using Fig. 7.

20 The system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a quick review display state (step S181), and the flow advances to step S182.

25 In quick review display, image data transferred to the image display memory 24 by the display image process in step S180 is displayed on the aforementioned image sensing region of the image display unit 28 via the

memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thus implementing an electronic viewfinder function that automatically plays back a sensed image.

5 The system control circuit 50 executes a compression process in which various image processes are done using the memory control circuit 22 and image processing circuit 20 if required by reading out sensed image data written in the memory 30, or an image is compressed in correspondence with the selected mode
10 using the compression/expansion circuit 32 (step S182). After that, the system control circuit 50 executes a recording process for writing image data in the recording medium 500 or 510 such as a memory card, compact flash card, or the like via the interface 90 or
15 94, and the connector 92 or 96 (step S183).

The details of the flow of this compression process step S182 are the same as those in Fig. 8 that has already been described in the first embodiment, but will be explained again later using Fig. 8.

20 When the image display unit 28 is ON, a message such as "BUSY" or the like that indicates that a write is in progress is displayed on the image display unit 28 during a write of image data on the recording medium 500 or 510.

Furthermore, the indication unit 54 makes a recording medium write access indication by flickering an LED or the like in combination with the above message.

The system control circuit 50 continues quick
5 review display on the image display unit 28 until the shutter switch SW2 is released (step S184). With this display, the user can carefully check the sensed image while pressing the shutter switch SW2.

If the shutter switch SW2 is released (step S184),
10 the system control circuit 50 sets the panoramic image sensing start flag (step S185) to indicate that the first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes. In this manner, as has been described in step S142, the image sensing
15 direction can be inhibited from being reversed after the first image is sensed in the horizontal or vertical panoramic mode.

The system control circuit 50 sets the variable n to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing region
20 (step S186), and resets the variable m to $m = 1$ (step S187). Then, the flow returns to step S134 to repeat a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

In this manner, after the control returns to step S134 upon releasing the shutter switch SW2, the next
25 image sensing region is selected in step S146, the image sensing regions which include the previous image sensing

region and display sensed images are set in the quick review display state, and the next image sensing region is set in the through display state, so as to display the sensed images and the next image to be sensed to overlap each other in step S148, thus allowing the user to easily sense panoramic images.

Figs. 14A and 14B that have already been described in the first embodiment show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the horizontal panoramic mode.

Fig. 14A shows the image sensing window before sensing the first image, and Fig. 14B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed. Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the first image sensing, the first image sensing region in Fig. 14A on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

Figs. 15A and 15B that have already been described in the first embodiment show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the vertical panoramic mode.

Fig. 15A shows the image sensing window before sensing the first image, and Fig. 15B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed. Although no dedicated

explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the first image sensing, the first image sensing region in Fig. 15A on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

5 Furthermore, Figs. 12A to 13B that have already been described in the first embodiment show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the 2 × 2 panoramic mode.

Fig. 12A shows the image sensing window before the
10 first image is sensed. Fig. 12B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed, i.e., before the second image is sensed.

Fig. 13A shows the image sensing window upon
15 releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the second image is sensed, i.e., before the third image is sensed, and Fig. 13B shows the image sensing window upon canceling the shutter switch SW2 after the third image is sensed, i.e., before the fourth image is sensed.

20 Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the n-th image sensing, the n-th image sensing region in Figs. 12A to 13B on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state. When the shutter
25 switch SW2 is released, a through display of the

(n+1)-th image sensing region as the next region is added.

As mentioned above, according to the second embodiment, after a series of panoramic image sensing processes have started, zoom operation is inhibited, and a predetermined alert is generated, thus preventing an image unsuitable for panoramic synthesis from being sensed by zoom operation of the photographing lens 310 during a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

Fig. 5 is a flow chart showing the flow of the operation of the distance measurement/photometry process in step S174 shown in Fig. 21 in detail.

The system control circuit 50 reads out a charge signal from the image sensing element 14, and the image processing circuit 20 sequentially reads sensed image data via the A/D converter 16 (step S501). Using the read image data, the image processing circuit 20 makes predetermined computations used in the TTL (Through The Lens) AE (auto exposure) process, EF (flash pre-emission) process, and AF (auto focus) process.

Note that the respective processes extract specific portions at required positions from all pixels, and use them in computations. In this manner, in the TTL AE, EF, AWB, and AF processes, optimal computations can be made in units of different modes, i.e., a

center-weighted mode, average mode, evaluation mode, and the like.

The system control circuit 50 makes the exposure control means ~~340~~ ^{340 3407 3407 3407} execute AE control using the
5 computation results of the image processing circuit 20 (step S503) until it is determined that the exposure value (AE) is appropriate (step S502).

The system control circuit 50 checks using
10 measurement data obtained by the AE control if flash emission is required (step S504). If flash emission is required, the system control circuit 50 sets a flash flag to charge the electronic flash 48 (step S505).

If it is determined that the exposure value (AE) is appropriate (step S502), the system control circuit
15 50 stores the measurement data and/or setting parameters in its internal memory or the memory 52.

The system control circuit 50 makes the image processing circuit 20 execute AWB control by adjusting the color processing parameters (step S507) using the
20 computation results of the image processing circuit 20 and measurement data obtained by the AE control, until it is determined that the white balance (AWB) is appropriate (step S506).

If it is determined that the white balance (AWB)
25 is appropriate (step S506), the system control circuit

50 stores the measurement data and/or setting parameters in its internal memory or the memory 52.

The system control circuit 50 makes the distance measurement control means 342 execute AF control using measurement data obtained by the AE control and AWB control (step S509), until it is determined that the distance measurement (AF) result indicates in-focus (step S508).

If it is determined that the distance measurement (AF) result indicates in-focus (step S508), the system control circuit 50 stores the measurement data and/or setting parameters in its internal memory or the memory 52, thus ending the distance measurement/photometry process routine step S174.

Fig. 6 is a flow chart showing the image sensing process in step S179 in Fig. 21 in detail.

The system control circuit 50 opens the shutter 312 having a stop function using the exposure control means 340 in accordance with photometry data stored in its internal memory or the memory 52 to expose the image sensing element 14 (steps S601 and S602).

The system control circuit 50 checks based on the flash flag if the electronic flash 48 is required (step S603). If the electronic flash 48 is required, the system control circuit 50 controls the electronic flash to emit light (step S604).

5 The system control circuit 50 waits for completion of exposure of the image sensing element 14 in accordance with the photometry data (step S605), closes the shutter 312 (step S606), and reads a charge signal from the image sensing element 14 and writes sensed image data in the memory 30 via the A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22 or directly from the A/D converter 16 via the memory control circuit 22 (step S607).

10 Upon completion of a series of processes, the image sensing process routine step S179 ends.

Fig. 7 is a flow chart showing the display image process in step S180 in Fig. 21 in detail.

15 If a frame process is required in correspondence with the selected image sensing mode (step S701), the system control circuit 50 reads out image data written in the memory 30, executes a vertical addition process (step S702) and color process (step S703) in turn using the memory control circuit 22 and image processing apparatus 20 if required, and writes the processed image data in the memory 30.

20 The system control circuit 50 reads out image data from the memory 30, and transfers display image data to the image display memory 24 via the memory control circuit 22 (step S704).

Upon completion of a series of processes, the display image process routine step S180 ends.

Fig. 8 is a flow chart showing the compression process in step S182 in Fig. 21 in detail.

5 The system control circuit 50 executes a pixel squaring process for reading out sensed image data written in the memory 30, and converting the vertical-to-horizontal pixel ratio of the image sensing element to 1 : 1 by interpolation using the memory
10 control circuit 22 and image processing circuit 20 if required (step S801). The system control circuit 50 then writes the processed image data in the memory 30.

 The system control circuit 50 reads out image data written in the memory 30, and executes image compression
15 corresponding to the selected mode using the compression/expansion circuit 32 (step S802).

 Upon completion of image compression, the compression process routine step S182 ends.
(Third Embodiment)

20 The operation of the third embodiment will be described below with reference to Figs. 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 5, 6, 7, and 8. The arrangement of the third embodiment has the same appearance as that of the second embodiment, except for its operation. Also, the
25 processes shown in Figs. 5, 6, 7, and 8 are the same as

those in the second embodiment, and a detailed description thereof will be omitted.

The operation of the third embodiment will be explained below using Figs. 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26.

5 Upon power ON after battery exchange or the like, the system control circuit 50 initializes flags, control variables, and the like, and initializes the respective units of the image processing apparatus 400 (step S901).

10 The system control circuit 50 checks the setting position of the mode dial 60. If the mode dial 60 is set at a power OFF position (step S902), the system control circuit 50 executes a predetermined end process (step S903). More specifically, the system control circuit 50 changes the indications of the respective indication
15 units to an end state, protects an image sensing unit by closing a barrier if the lens unit 300 comprises the barrier or the like serving as a protection means, records required parameters and setting values including flags, control variables, and the like, and the setting
20 mode in the nonvolatile memory 56, cuts off unnecessary power supply to the respective units of the image processing apparatus 400 including the image display unit 28 by the power supply control means 80, and so forth. After that, the flow returns to step S902.

25 If the mode dial 60 is set at any of other mode positions (step S902), the system control circuit 50

checks using the power supply control means 80 if the
remaining capacity and operation state of the power
supply means 86 comprising batteries and the like pose
any problem in the operation of the image processing
5 apparatus 400 (step S904). If any problem is found, a
predetermined alert indication is made by means of an
image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S906),
and the flow then returns to step S902.

When the image display of the image display unit
10 28 is ON, a predetermined alert display is made by means
of an image or voice also using the image display unit
28.

If no problem is found in the power supply means
86 (step S904), the system control circuit 50 checks if
15 the operation state of the recording medium 500 or 510
poses any problem in the operation of the image
processing apparatus 400, in particular,
recording/playback of image data to/from the recording
medium (step S905). If any problem is found, a
20 predetermined alert indication is made by means of an
image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S906),
and the flow then returns to step S902.

When the image display of the image display unit
28 is ON, a predetermined alert display is made by means
25 of an image or voice also using the image display unit
28.

----- If no problem is found in the operation state of -----
the recording medium 500 or 510 (step S905), various
setting states of the image display apparatus 400 are
indicated by means of an image or voice using the
5 indication unit 54 (step S907). When the image display
of the image display unit 28 is ON, various setting
states of the image display apparatus 400 are indicated
by means of an image or voice also using the image
display unit 28.

10 On the other hand, if the mode dial 60 is set at
an image sensing mode position (step S908), a
predetermined image sensing process is executed (step
S909). Upon completion of the process, the flow returns
to step S902.

15 If the mode dial 60 is set at any of other mode
positions (step S908), the system control circuit 50
executes a process corresponding to the selected mode
(step S910). Upon completion of the process, the flow
returns to step S902.

20 If the mode dial 60 is set at a panoramic mode
position (step S908), the system control circuit 50
checks if the zoom position of the photographing lens
310 is a predetermined home position (step S921). If the
photographing lens is not located at the home position,
25 the system control circuit 50 moves the zoom position to
the home position (step S922).

Also, when the photographing lens 310 uses a selectable lens that can select one of a plurality of different focal lengths, the system control circuit 50 checks if that selectable lens of the photographing lens 5 310 is located on the predetermined home position side (step S921). If the selectable lens is not located on the home position side, the system control circuit 50 moves the selectable lens to the home position side (step S922).

10 As an example of the home position, in case of a zoom lens, the WIDE end as a focal length position on the wide-angle side suitable for panoramic image sensing can be used.

In case of a focal length selectable lens, a lens 15 with a focal length on the WIDE side as that on the wide-angle end suitable for panoramic image sensing may be selected.

The present invention is not limited to such specific example, and any focal length may be set at a 20 home position as long as it is suitable for panoramic image sensing.

The system control circuit 50 displays a panoramic mode selection window on the image display unit (step S911).

25 The user of the image processing apparatus 400 can select an arbitrary one of a plurality of panoramic

image sensing modes by observing the panoramic mode selection window displayed on the image display unit 28.

The panoramic image sensing modes include a 2×2 panoramic mode, horizontal panoramic mode, vertical panoramic mode, and the like. In these modes, by combining a plurality of sensed images, a panoramic image, which is extended two-dimensionally, horizontally, or vertically, can be obtained.

A series of sensed images are appended with information indicating their positional relationship, and can be combined to generate a signal panoramic image by the image processing apparatus 400 itself or after they are transferred to, e.g., a computer or the like.

Note that an example of the panoramic mode selection window is the same as that shown in Fig. 9 that has already been explained.

Referring to Fig. 9, the left icon is used for selecting the 2×2 panoramic mode for sensing a two-dimensional panoramic image, the central icon is used for selecting the horizontal panoramic mode for sensing a horizontal panoramic image, and the right icon is used for selecting a vertical panoramic mode for sensing a vertical panoramic image.

The user of the image processing apparatus 400 can select a desired panoramic mode by the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key), and can determine that

panoramic mode by the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

When the panoramic mode is selected using the selection/change switch 66 and determination/execution switch 68, the system control circuit 50 sets initial values and memory areas of flags, parameters, and variables, reads out a display window serving as a user interface, and so forth in a 2 × 2 panoramic mode initial setup process (step S913), a vertical panoramic mode initial setup process (step S914), or a horizontal panoramic mode initial setup process (step S915) in correspondence with the selected panoramic mode (step S912), and displays a panoramic image sensing window corresponding to the selected mode on the image display unit 28 (step S916). The flow then advances to step S931.

Note that Figs. 10A and 10B that have already been explained show examples of the horizontal panoramic mode image sensing window, Figs. 11A and 11B show examples of the vertical panoramic mode image sensing window, and Figs. 12A and 12B that have already been explained show examples of the 2 × 2 panoramic mode image sensing window.

Fig. 10A shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows an image

sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing to the left.

Referring to Figs. 10A and 10B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region "1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, rightward image sensing (Fig. 10A) or leftward image sensing (Fig. 10B) can be desirably selected using the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key).

The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button in desired one of the display window states shown in Figs. 10A and 10B.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the horizontal panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

Fig. 11A shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing downward.

Referring to Figs. 11A and 11B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region "1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, upward image sensing (Fig. 11A) or downward image

sensing (Fig. 11B) can be desirably selected using the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key).

The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button
5 in desired one of the display window states shown in Figs. 11A and 11B.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the vertical panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

10 Fig. 12A shows an image sensing window for the first image upon creating a 2×2 panoramic window by two-dimensionally repeating image sensing of a total of four images in the vertical and horizontal directions, and Fig. 12B shows an image sensing window for the
15 second image.

Referring to Figs. 12A and 12B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., an upper right region to sense the first one of panoramic images.

20 Upon completion of image sensing of the first image, the playback image of the sensed image is displayed on, e.g., the upper right region, and a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., the lower right region to sense the
25 second image.

5 The image sensing region of the electronic
viewfinder is switched in turn to the next region after
each image sensing. However, image sensing may be
started from an arbitrary region, or may be redone by
returning to the already sensed region. For this purpose,
the image sensing region can be desirably shifted using
the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] switch).

10 The image sensing region to be re-sensed is
determined and image sensing is executed by pressing the
shutter button in a display window state that selects a
desired region.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the 2
× 2 panoramic mode by pressing the
determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

15 The system control circuit 50 initializes flags
and variables set in its internal memory or the memory
52. For example, the system control circuit 50 resets a
panoramic image sensing start flag (step S931), sets
variables m and n, and initializes them to m = 1 and n =
20 1, respectively (steps S933 and S932).

Note that the panoramic image sensing start flag
is reset to indicate that no panoramic image sensing
processes have been done.

25 Also, the variable n indicates the position of the
current image sensing region in image sensing of each
panoramic mode.

circuit 50 checks the status of the panoramic image sensing start flag (step S962).

5 If the panoramic image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., if the first image is not sensed yet in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S962), the system control circuit 50 executes predetermined zoom operation for zooming the photographing lens 310 via the interface 420, connector 422, connector 322, interface 320, lens system control circuit 350, and zoom control means 344 in accordance with an instruction input by the zoom switch WIDE 74 or zoom switch TELE 76 (step S963).
10 The flow then advances to step S937.

15 If the panoramic image sensing start flag is set, i.e., if the first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S962), the system control circuit 50 makes a predetermined alert display by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 54 and/or the image display unit 28 (step S964). Furthermore, if confirmation of the end of a series of panoramic image sensing processes is
20 selected (step S965), the system control circuit 50 temporarily ends the series of panoramic image sensing processes executed so far, and the flow returns to step S931 to start a new series of panoramic image sensing
25 processes.

On the other hand, if cancel of the end of a series of panoramic image sensing processes is selected (step S965), the flow advances to step S937 without executing any zoom operation.

5 With this control, an image which is unsuitable for panoramic synthesis can be prevented from being sensed by zoom operation of the photographing lens 310 during a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

10 If the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) has been pressed while the image display unit 28 displays one of the above-mentioned panoramic image sensing windows (step S937), the system control circuit 50 executes a predetermined process in correspondence with the setups of the panoramic mode (step S938).

15 If the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) is not pressed (step S937), the flow advances to step S946.

20 If the 2×2 panoramic mode is selected (step S938), the system control circuit 50 sets the variable n to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing region (step S939). If $n = 5$ (step S940), the first image sensing region is selected by setting $n = n - 4$ (step S941). After that, the flow advances to step S946.

25 More specifically, every time the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) is pressed, the image sensing region of interest shifts to one of the four image

sensing regions in the 2×2 panoramic mode. For example,
the image sensing region of interest shifts in the order
of the upper right region, lower right region, lower
left region, upper left region, upper right region,
5 lower right region,....

On the other hand, if the horizontal or vertical
panoramic mode is selected (step S938), and if the
panoramic image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., if
the first image is not sensed yet in a series of
10 panoramic image sensing processes (step S942), the
system control circuit 50 reverses the image sensing
direction of the selected panoramic mode (step S943).
After that, the flow advances to step S946.

Note that the image sensing direction can be
15 repetitively reversed before the first image is sensed.

Figs. 10A and 10B that have already been described
show examples of an image sensing direction reverse
window in the horizontal panoramic mode.

Fig. 10A shows a window upon repeating image
20 sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows a window upon
repeating image sensing to the left.

Figs. 11A and 11B that have already been described
show examples of an image sensing direction reverse
window in the vertical panoramic mode.

Fig. 11A shows a window upon repeating image sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows a window upon repeating image sensing downward.

On the other hand, if the horizontal or vertical panoramic mode is selected (step S938) and if the panoramic image sensing start flag is set, i.e., if the first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S942), the system control circuit 50 computes $m = m \times (-1)$, the sign of which changes like -1, +1, -1, +1, ... in every computation (step S944), and also computes $n = n + m$ for the variable n , which changes like $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, ... in every computation (step S945). After that, the flow advances to step S946.

With this control, movement to the already sensed region (which is limited to the one sensed last) or cancel that movement can be repetitively selected to sense an image again.

After panoramic image sensing of the n -th image region, the user presses the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the $(n-1)$ -th and n -th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions. Then, the user temporarily releases the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to display a through image on the n -th image region, and presses the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key)

once again to display the original quick review image on the n-th image region and a through image on the (n+1)-th image region, thus executing the next panoramic image sensing.

5 After panoramic image sensing of the n-th image region, upon pressing the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the (n-1)-th and n-th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions, if the user determines that image
10 sensing must be redone, he or she temporarily releases the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the shutter switch SW2 in that window state to replace the image with the newly sensed image. Then, the
15 user can execute the next panoramic image sensing.

 The system control circuit 50 selects the n-th image region (step S946). If the window layout must be changed in correspondence with the selected image region (step S947), the system control circuit 50 switches and
20 displays a new window layout (step S948) The flow then advances to step S971.

 In this fashion, a window corresponding to the reversed image sensing direction, as described above, a window corresponding to the changed image sensing region,
25 a window that has updated characters and images for comments, or the like can be displayed as needed.

Upon sensing the second and subsequent images, the image sensing regions that display already sensed images are set in a quick review display state, and the image sensing region selected for the next image sensing is
5 set in a through display state, thus displaying a playback image of the already sensed image and the next image to be sensed to partially overlap each other. In this manner, the user of the image processing apparatus 400 can easily determine the next image sensing angle.

10 The system control circuit 50 sets a through display state in which sensed image data is displayed as it is sensed (step S971), and the flow advances to step S972.

15 In through display, data, which have been written in the image display memory 24 via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22, are displayed on the aforementioned image sensing region of the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A
20 converter 26, thereby implementing an electronic viewfinder function.

If the shutter switch SW1 is not pressed (step S972), the flow returns to step S934.

If the shutter switch SW1 has been pressed (step
25 S972), the system control circuit 50 sets the display

state of the image display unit 28 in a freeze display state (step S973), and the flow advances to step S974.

In freeze display, image data on the image display memory 24 is inhibited from being rewritten via the
5 image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22, and the latest written image data is displayed on the above-mentioned image display region of the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and
10 D/A converter 26, thus displaying a frozen image on the electronic viewfinder.

The system control circuit 50 executes distance measurement to adjust the focus of the photographing lens 310 on the object, and executes photometry to
15 determine the aperture value and shutter speed (step S974). In photometry, the electronic flash is set if necessary.

The details of the flow of this distance measurement/photometry process step S974 are the same as
20 those in the second embodiment that has already been described using Fig. 5.

Upon completion of the distance measurement/photometry process step S974, the system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image
25 display unit 28 in a through display state (step S975), and the flow advances to step S976. Note that the

through display state in step S975 is the same as that in step S971.

If the shutter switch SW2 is not pressed (step S976) and the shutter switch SW1 is canceled (step S977),
5 the flow returns to step S934.

If the shutter switch SW2 has been pressed (step S976), the system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a fixed-color display state (step S978), and the flow advances to step
10 S979.

In fixed-color display, in place of sensed image data, which has been written in the image display memory 24 via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit
15 22, substitute fixed-color image data is displayed on the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thus displaying a fixed-color image on the electronic viewfinder.

The system control circuit 50 executes an image
20 sensing process including an exposure process for writing sensed image data in the memory 30 via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22 or directly from the A/D converter 16 via the memory control circuit
25 22, and a development process for executing various processes by reading out image data written in the

memory 30 using the memory control circuit 22 and image processing circuit 20 if required (step S979).

The details of the flow of this image sensing process step S979 are the same as those in the second
5 embodiment that has already been described using Fig. 6.

The system control circuit 50 executes a display image process for reading out image data written in the memory 30 by the image sensing process in step S979, and transferring the readout data to the image display
10 memory 24 via the memory control circuit 22 (step S980).

The details of the flow of this display image process step S980 are the same as those in the second embodiment that has already been described using Fig. 7.

The system control circuit 50 sets the display
15 state of the image display unit 28 in a quick review display state (step S981), and the flow advances to step S982.

In quick review display, image data transferred to the image display memory 24 by the display image process
20 in step S980 is displayed on the aforementioned image sensing region of the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thus implementing an electronic viewfinder function that automatically plays back a sensed image.

25 The system control circuit 50 executes a compression process in which various image processes are

done using the memory control circuit 22 and image
processing circuit 20 if required by reading out sensed
image data written in the memory 30, or an image is
compressed in correspondence with the selected mode
5 using the compression/expansion circuit 32 (step S982).
After that, the system control circuit 50 executes a
recording process for writing image data in the
recording medium 500 or 510 such as a memory card,
compact flash card, or the like via the interface 90 or
10 94, and the connector 92 or 96 (step S983).

The details of the flow of this compression
process step S982 are the same as those in the second
embodiment that has already been described using Fig. 8.

When the image display unit 28 is ON, a message
15 such as "BUSY" or the like that indicates that a write
is in progress is displayed on the image display unit 28
during a write of image data on the recording medium 500
or 510.

Furthermore, the indication unit 54 makes a
20 recording medium write access indication by flickering
an LED or the like in combination with the above message.

The system control circuit 50 continues quick
review display on the image display unit 28 until the
shutter switch SW2 is released (step S984). With this
25 display, the user can carefully check the sensed image
while pressing the shutter switch SW2.

If the shutter switch SW2 is released (step S984), the system control circuit 50 sets the panoramic image sensing start flag (step S985) to indicate that the first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes. In this manner, as has been described in step S942, the image sensing direction can be inhibited from being reversed after the first image is sensed in the horizontal or vertical panoramic mode.

10 The system control circuit 50 sets the variable n to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing region (step S986), and resets the variable m to $m = 1$ (step S987). Then, the flow returns to step S934 to repeat a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

15 In this manner, after the control returns to step S934 upon releasing the shutter switch SW2, the next image sensing region is selected in step S946, the image sensing regions which include the previous image sensing region and display sensed images are set in the quick review display state, and the next image sensing region is set in the through display state, so as to display the sensed images and the next image to be sensed to overlap each other in step S948, thus allowing the user to easily sense panoramic images.

25 Figs. 14A and 14B that have already been described show examples of the image sensing window before and

after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the horizontal panoramic mode.

Fig. 14A shows the image sensing window before sensing the first image, and Fig. 14B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed. Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the first image sensing, the first image sensing region in Fig. 14A on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

Figs. 15A and 15B that have already been described show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the vertical panoramic mode.

Fig. 15A shows the image sensing window before sensing the first image, and Fig. 15B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed. Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the first image sensing, the first image sensing region in Fig. 15A on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

Furthermore, Figs. 12A to 13B that have already been described show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the 2×2 panoramic mode.

Fig. 12A shows the image sensing window before the first image is sensed. Fig. 12B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed, i.e., before the second image is sensed.

Fig. 13A shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the second image is sensed, i.e., before the third image is sensed, and Fig. 13B shows the image sensing window upon canceling the shutter switch SW2 after the third image is sensed, i.e., before the fourth image is sensed.

Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the n-th image sensing, the n-th image sensing region in Figs. 12A to 13B on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state. When the shutter switch SW2 is released, a through display of the (n+1)-th image sensing region as the next region is added.

As mentioned above, according to the third embodiment, when zoom operation is done after the start of a series of panoramic image sensing processes, a predetermined alert is generated to ask the user of the image processing apparatus 400 if he or she actually wants to zoom. After that, a series of panoramic image sensing processes are temporarily interrupted. Thus, an

image which is unsuitable for panoramic synthesis can be prevented from being sensed by zoom operation of the photographing lens 310 during a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

5 The second and third embodiments have been explained using Fig. 16.

10 In the description of the second and third embodiments, the photographing lens 310 uses a zoom lens, but may use a selectable lens that can select one of a wide-angle lens and telephoto lens. In this case, as in the description of the embodiments, execution of lens selection is inhibited in correspondence with the state of the panoramic image sensing start flag, and a predetermined alert is generated. Or after a
15 predetermined alert is generated to ask the user if he or she actually wants such lens selection, a series of panoramic image sensing processes can be ended, and a new series of panoramic image sensing processes can be started.

20 In the description of the third embodiment, if the end of a series of panoramic image sensing processes is confirmed in step S965, the flow returns to step S931 to start a new series of panoramic image sensing processes. Alternatively, the flow may return to step S921 to
25 restart setups from the panoramic mode selection window,

and then a new series of panoramic image sensing processes may be started.

Note that the number of types of selectable panoramic modes on the panoramic mode selection window is 3, i.e., the 2 x 2 panoramic mode, horizontal panoramic mode, and vertical panoramic mode. However, the present invention is not limited to these specific modes, and one or a plurality of types of an arbitrary number of different panoramic modes may be selectable.

Also, display of the panoramic mode selection window shown in Fig. 9 is not limited to this example. Alternatively, display with an arbitrary layout or scheme using an image or voice may be made.

On the 2 x 2 panoramic mode image sensing window, a total of four images are two-dimensionally laid out in a 2 x 2 matrix. However, the present invention is not limited to such matrix. For example, an arbitrary number of images such as a total of nine images, a total of 16 images, and the like may be laid out in a two-dimensional or three-dimensional matrix.

On the horizontal and vertical panoramic mode image sensing windows, two images are continuously displayed. However, the present invention is not limited to such specific display, and an arbitrary number of images (e.g., three images, four images, and the like) may be one-dimensionally displayed.

The displays of the panoramic mode image sensing windows shown in Figs. 10A to 15B are not limited to these examples, and displays with arbitrary layouts and schemes using images, voices, characters, symbols, and the like may be made.

In the horizontal and vertical panoramic modes, the image sensing direction is inhibited from being reversed after the first image is sensed. However, the present invention is not limited to this, and the image sensing direction may be reversed as needed. Also, the image sensing direction may be changed in one of arbitrary directions including the right and left directions, up and down directions, or oblique directions. In the present invention, when a large number of image display regions can be simultaneously displayed by increasing the display area of the image display unit 28, the image sensing direction can be changed in one of arbitrary directions including the right and left directions, up and down directions, or oblique directions.

Image sensing can be redone for only the immediately preceding sensed image in the horizontal and vertical panoramic modes. However, the present invention is not limited to this. For example, image sensing may be redone for an image sensed an arbitrary number of images before.

The next image display region for displaying an image to be sensed is set in the through display state, and that for displaying the already sensed image is set in the quick review display state, to display a playback
5 image of the already sensed image and the next image to be sensed so that their boundary regions partially overlap each other. However, the present invention is

for example, the images may be displayed without making their boundary
10 regions overlap each other.

In the explanatory views of the panoramic modes in Figs. 10A to 15B, for example, comment words "LIVE" and "FREEZE" are added within the image display regions. However, the actual image display unit 28 may or may not
15 display these comment words.

In the above description, the lens unit 300 is independent from the image processing apparatus 400 and is arbitrarily connectable. However, the lens unit 300 may be integrated with the image processing apparatus
20 400.

Furthermore, a plurality of lens units 300 may be detachably attached to the image processing apparatus 400.

The recording media 500 and 510 are not limited to
25 memory cards such as PCMCIA cards, compact flash cards, or the like, hard disks, and the like, but may use micro

DATs (digital audio tapes), magneto-optical disks, optical disks such as CD-Rs, CD-WRs, or the like, phase change optical disks such as DVDs, and the like.

Also, the recording media 500 and 510 may use
5 hybrid media that integrate memory cards, hard disks, and the like. Furthermore, such hybrid media may include detachable media.

embodiments, the recording media 500 and 510 are
10 independent from the image processing apparatus 400 and are arbitrarily connectable. One or both the recording media 500 and 510 may be permanently connected to the image processing apparatus 400. When all the recording media are permanently connected to the image processing
15 apparatus 400, no alert display is made in correspondence with the presence/absence of recording media. However, when all the recording media are incapable of recording due to failures, a recording inhibition setup state, no free recording area, and the
20 like, the same effect as in the above embodiments can be obtained.

An arbitrary number (one or a plurality) of image recording media 500 or 510 may be connectable to the image processing apparatus 400.

25 In the above description, the recording media 500 and 510 are attached to the image processing apparatus.

However, one or a combination of a plurality of recording media may be used.

In the description of the second and third embodiments, the focal length is changed as a changeable
5 condition of the optical system of the photographing lens. However, the present invention is not limited to such specific condition. For example, the changeable

lenses, stop, focus position, shutter speed, and the
10 like, and the present invention can be applied to such changes in condition of the optical system.

Synthesis of a panoramic image has been described as an example in which a plurality of images are associated. Also, the present invention can be applied
15 to a case wherein a plurality of images are sensed while shifting pixels, and a high-resolution image is obtained by synthesizing these images.

To restate, the second and third embodiments can solve the conventional problem that the image quality
20 deteriorates considerably due to extra correction computations required to correct different focal lengths upon generating a panoramic image by combining a plurality of sensed images when the user of the image processing apparatus such as an electronic camera or the
25 like switches the focal length of the photographing lens or performs zooming.

Also, the second and third embodiments can solve the conventional problems that the outer shape of a synthesized panoramic image varies in units of sensed image and has steps when the individual sensed images
5 have considerably different angles due to switching of the focal length of the photographing lens or zooming.

Furthermore, the second and third embodiments can

~~eliminate a situation in the conventional art where the~~
aforementioned problems readily occur when the user
10 switches the focal length of the photographing lens or zooms even during sensing of a plurality of images for obtaining a panoramic image if he or she notices during panoramic image sensing that the focal length of the photographing lens is switched to a side unsuitable for
15 panoramic image sensing or that the zoom position of the zoom lens is unsuitable for panoramic image sensing.

(Fourth Embodiment)

The operation of the fourth embodiment will be described below with reference to Figs. 27, 28, 29, 30,
20 5, 6, 7, and 8. The arrangement of the fourth embodiment has the same appearance as that of the second embodiment, except for its operation. Also, the processes shown in Figs. 5, 6, 7, and 8 are the same as those in the second embodiment, and a detailed description thereof will be
25 omitted.

Figs. 27, 28, 29, and 30 are flow charts showing the main routine of the image processing apparatus 400 of this embodiment.

The operation of the third embodiment will be explained below using Figs. 27, 28, 29, and 30.

Upon power ON after battery exchange or the like, the system control circuit 50 initializes flags, control

units of the image processing apparatus 400 (step S1101).

10 The system control circuit 50 checks the setting position of the mode dial 60. If the mode dial 60 is set at a power OFF position (step S1102), the system control circuit 50 executes a predetermined end process (step S1103). More specifically, the system control circuit 50
15 changes the indications of the respective indication units to an end state, protects an image sensing unit by closing a barrier if the lens unit 300 comprises the barrier or the like serving as a protection means, records required parameters and setting values including
20 flags, control variables, and the like, and the setting mode in the nonvolatile memory 56, cuts off unnecessary power supply to the respective units of the image processing apparatus 400 including the image display unit 28 by the power supply control means 80, and so
25 forth. After that, the flow returns to step S1102.

If the mode dial 60 is set at any of other mode positions (step S1102), the system control circuit 50 checks using the power supply control means 80 if the remaining capacity and operation state of the power supply means 86 comprising batteries and the like pose any problem in the operation of the image processing apparatus 400 (step S1104). If any problem is found,

predetermined alert indication is made by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S1106), and the flow then returns to step S1102.

When the image display of the image display unit 28 is ON, a predetermined alert display is made by means of an image or voice also using the image display unit 28.

If no problem is found in the power supply means 86 (step S1104), the system control circuit 50 checks if the operation state of the recording medium 500 or 510 poses any problem in the operation of the image processing apparatus 400, in particular, recording/playback of image data to/from the recording medium (step S1105). If any problem is found, a predetermined alert indication is made by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S1106), and the flow then returns to step S1102.

When the image display of the image display unit 28 is ON, a predetermined alert display is made by means

of an image or voice also using the image display unit
28.

If no problem is found in the operation state of
the recording medium 500 or 510 (step S1105), various
5 setting states of the image display apparatus 400 are
indicated by means of an image or voice using the
indication unit 54 (step S1107). When the image display

states of the image display apparatus 400 are indicated
10 by means of an image or voice also using the image
display unit 28.

On the other hand, if the mode dial 60 is set at
an image sensing mode position (step S1108), a
predetermined image sensing process is executed (step
15 S1109). Upon completion of the process, the flow returns
to step S1102.

If the mode dial 60 is set at any of other mode
positions (step S1108), the system control circuit 50
executes a process corresponding to the selected mode
20 (step S1110). Upon completion of the process, the flow
returns to step S1102.

If the mode dial 60 is set at a panoramic mode
position (step S1108), the system control circuit 50
displays a panoramic mode selection window on the image
25 display unit (step S1111).

The user of the image processing apparatus 400 can select a desired panoramic mode by the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key), and can determine that panoramic mode by the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

When the panoramic mode is selected using the selection/change switch 66 and determination/execution

switch 68, the system controller 401 reads out values and memory areas of flags, parameters, and variables, reads out a display window serving as a user interface, and so forth in a 2 x 2 panoramic mode initial setup process (step S1113), a vertical panoramic mode initial setup process (step S1114), or a horizontal panoramic mode initial setup process (step S1115) in correspondence with the selected panoramic mode (step S1112), and displays a panoramic image sensing window corresponding to the selected mode on the image display unit 28 (step S1116). The flow then advances to step S1131.

Note that Figs. 10A and 10B that have already been described show examples of the horizontal panoramic mode image sensing window, Figs. 11A and 11B that have already been described show examples of the vertical panoramic mode image sensing window, and Figs. 12A and 12B that have already been described show examples of the 2 x 2 panoramic mode image sensing window.

Fig. 10A shows an image sensing window that
creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating
image sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows an image
sensing window that creates a panoramic window by
5 continuously repeating image sensing to the left.

Referring to Figs. 10A and 10B, a through image
from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region

images. Before completion of image sensing of the first
10 image, rightward image sensing (Fig. 10A) or leftward
image sensing (Fig. 10B) can be desirably selected using
the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key).

The image sensing direction is determined by
sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button
15 in desired one of the display window states shown in
Figs. 10A and 10B.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the
horizontal panoramic mode by pressing the
determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

20 Fig. 11A shows an image sensing window that
creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating
image sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows an image
sensing window that creates a panoramic window by
continuously repeating image sensing downward.

25 Referring to Figs. 11A and 11B, a through image
from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region

"1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, upward image sensing (Fig. 11A) or downward image sensing (Fig. 11B) can be desirably selected using the
5 selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key).

The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the

desired one of the display window states shown in Figs. 11A and 11B.

10 Note that the user can end image sensing in the vertical panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

Fig. 12A shows an image sensing window for the first image upon creating a 2×2 panoramic window by
15 two-dimensionally repeating image sensing of a total of four images in the vertical and horizontal directions, and Fig. 12B shows an image sensing window for the second image.

Referring to Figs. 12A and 12B, a through image
20 from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., an upper right region to sense the first one of panoramic images.

Upon completion of image sensing of the first image, a playback image of the sensed image is displayed
25 on, e.g., the upper right region, and a through image

from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g.,
the lower right region to sense the second image.

The image sensing region of the electronic
viewfinder is switched in turn to the next region after
5 each image sensing. However, image sensing may be
started from an arbitrary region, or may be redone by
returning to the already sensed region. For this purpose,

the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] switch).

10 The image sensing region to be re-sensed is
determined and image sensing is executed by pressing the
shutter button in a display window state that selects a
desired region.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the 2
15 \times 2 panoramic mode by pressing the
determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

The system control circuit 50 initializes flags
and variables set in its internal memory or the memory
52. For example, the system control circuit 50 resets a
20 panoramic image sensing start flag (step S1131), sets
variables m and n, and initializes them to m = 1 and n =
1, respectively (steps S1133 and S1132).

Note that the panoramic image sensing start flag
is reset to indicate that no panoramic image sensing
25 processes have been done.

Also, the variable n indicates the position of the current image sensing region in image sensing of each panoramic mode.

The variable m is used for returning the image sensing region of interest to the immediately preceding region or canceling such return, upon executing image sensing again in the horizontal and vertical panoramic

modes.

An example of the method of using these flag and variables will be explained later.

If the mode dial 60 is set at any of mode positions other than the panoramic mode (step S1134), the system control circuit 50 ends image sensing in the panoramic mode, and the flow returns to step S1102. In this manner, the user of the image processing apparatus 400 can end the panoramic mode anytime he or she wants, and can select another mode.

If end of the panoramic mode is selected by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key) (step S1135) while the mode dial 60 is kept set at the panoramic mode position (step S1134), i.e., the display window of the image display unit 28 keeps displaying the corresponding panoramic image sensing window, a panoramic mode end confirmation message is displayed. Furthermore, if confirmation of end is

selected (step S1136), the flow returns to step S1111 of displaying the panoramic mode selection window.

The system control circuit 50 checks if the lens unit 300 is attached to the image processing apparatus
5 400 (step S1161). If the lens unit 300 is attached, the flow advances to step S1137.

If the lens unit 300 is not attached to the image

control circuit 50 checks the status of the panoramic
10 image sensing start flag (step S1162).

If the panoramic image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., if the first image is not sensed yet in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S1162), the system control circuit 50 displays that no lens is
15 attached using the indication unit 54 and/or image display unit 28 to call user's attention (step S1163). The flow then advances to step S1137.

If the panoramic image sensing start flag is set, i.e., if the first image has already been sensed in a
20 series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S1162), the system control circuit 50 makes a predetermined alert display by means of an image or voice using the indication unit 54 and/or the image display unit 28 (step S1164). Furthermore, if confirmation of the end of
25 a series of panoramic image sensing processes is selected (step S1165), the series of panoramic image

sensing processes executed so far end, and the flow returns to step S1131 to start a new series of panoramic image sensing processes.

If cancel of the end of a series of panoramic
5 image sensing processes is selected (step S1165), the flow returns to step S1134.

With this process, an image, which is unsuitable

10 sensed when the lens unit 300 is exchanged by another lens unit with a different focal length during a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

If the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) has been pressed while the image display unit 28 displays one of the above-mentioned panoramic image
15 sensing windows (step S1137), the system control circuit 50 executes a predetermined process in correspondence with the setups of the panoramic mode (step S1138).

If the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) is not pressed (step S1137), the flow advances to step
20 S1146.

If the 2×2 panoramic mode is selected (step S1138), the system control circuit 50 sets the variable n to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing region (step S1139). If $n = 5$ (step S1140), the first
25 image sensing region is selected by setting $n = n - 4$

(step S1141). After that, the flow advances to step
S1146.

More specifically, every time the selection/change
switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) is pressed, the image sensing
5 region of interest shifts to one of the four image
sensing regions in the 2×2 panoramic mode. For example,
the image sensing region of interest shifts in the order

left region, upper left region, upper right region,
10 lower right region,....

On the other hand, if the horizontal or vertical
panoramic mode is selected (step S1138), and if the
panoramic image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., if
the first image is not sensed yet in a series of
15 panoramic image sensing processes (step S1142), the
system control circuit 50 reverses the image sensing
direction of the selected panoramic mode (step S1143).
After that, the flow advances to step S1146.

Note that the image sensing direction can be
20 repetitively reversed before the first image is sensed.

Figs. 10A and 10B that have already been described
show examples of an image sensing direction reverse
window in the horizontal panoramic mode.

Fig. 10A shows a window upon repeating image
25 sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows a window upon
repeating image sensing to the left.

Figs. 11A and 11B that have already been described show examples of an image sensing direction reverse window in the vertical panoramic mode.

Fig. 11A shows a window upon repeating image
5 sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows a window upon repeating image sensing downward.

On the other hand, if the horizontal or vertical

panoramic image sensing start flag is set, i.e., if the
10 first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S1142), the system control circuit 50 computes $m = m \times (-1)$, the sign of which changes like -1, +1, -1, +1, ... in every computation (step S1144), and also computes $n = n + m$
15 for the variable n , which changes like $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, ... in every computation (step S1145). After that, the flow advances to step S1146.

With this control, movement to the already sensed region (which is limited to the one sensed last) or
20 cancel that movement can be repetitively selected to sense an image again.

After panoramic image sensing of the n -th image region, the user presses the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the
25 $(n-1)$ -th and n -th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions. Then, the user temporarily releases

the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) once again to display the original quick review image on
5 the n-th image region and a through image on the (n+1)-th image region, thus executing the next panoramic image sensing.

After panoramic image sensing of the n-th image region, upon pressing the selection/change switch 66
10 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the (n-1)-th and n-th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions, if the user determines that image sensing must be redone, he or she temporarily releases the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to
15 display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the shutter switch SW2 in that window state to replace the image with the newly sensed image. Then, the user can execute the next panoramic image sensing.

The system control circuit 50 selects the n-th
20 image region (step S1146). If the window layout must be changed in correspondence with the selected image region (step S1147), the system control circuit 50 switches and displays a new window layout (step S1148), and the flow then advances to step S1191.

25 In this fashion, a window corresponding to the reversed image sensing direction, as described above, a

lens unit with a different focal length during a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

The system control circuit 50 sets a through display state in which sensed image data is displayed as
5 it is sensed (step S1171), and the flow advances to step S1172.

In through display, data, which have been written

element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit
10 20, and memory control circuit 22, are displayed on the aforementioned image sensing region of the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thereby implementing an electronic viewfinder function.

15 If the shutter switch SW1 is not pressed (step S1172), the flow returns to step S1134.

If the shutter switch SW1 has been pressed (step S1172), the system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a freeze display
20 state (step S1173), and the flow advances to step S1174.

In freeze display, image data on the image display memory 24 is inhibited from being rewritten via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22,
25 and the latest written image data is displayed on the above-mentioned image display region of the image

display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thus displaying a frozen image on the electronic viewfinder.

The system control circuit 50 executes distance measurement to adjust the focus of the photographing lens 310 on the object, and executes photometry to determine the aperture value and shutter speed (step

10 necessary. In photometry, the electronic flash is set if necessary.

The details of the flow of this distance measurement/photometry process step S1174 are the same as those of the second embodiment that has been described using Fig. 5.

Upon completion of the distance measurement/photometry process step S1174, the system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a through display state (step S1175), and the flow advances to step S1176. Note that the through display state in step S1175 is the same as that in step S1171.

If the shutter switch SW2 is not pressed (step S1176) and the shutter switch SW1 is canceled (step S1177), the flow returns to step S1134.

If the shutter switch SW2 has been pressed (step S1176), the system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a fixed-color

display state (step S1178), and the flow advances to step S1179.

In fixed-color display, in place of sensed image data, which has been written in the image display memory 24 via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22, substitute fixed-color image data is displayed on the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thus displaying a fixed-color image on the electronic viewfinder.

The system control circuit 50 executes an image sensing process including an exposure process for writing sensed image data in the memory 30 via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22 or directly from the A/D converter 16 via the memory control circuit 22, and a development process for executing various processes by reading out image data written in the memory 30 using the memory control circuit 22 and image processing circuit 20 if required (step S1179).

The details of the flow of this image sensing process step S1179 are the same as those of the second embodiment that has been described using Fig. 6.

25 The system control circuit 50 executes a display
image process for reading out image data written in the
memory 30 by the image sensing process in step S1179,

and transferring the readout data to the image display memory 24 via the memory control circuit 22 (step S1180).

The details of the flow of this display image process step S1180 are the same as those of the second
5 embodiment that has been described using Fig. 7.

The system control circuit 50 sets the display state of the image display unit 28 in a quick review

step S1182.

10 In quick review display, image data transferred to the image display memory 24 by the display image process in step S1180 is displayed on the aforementioned image sensing region of the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thus
15 implementing an electronic viewfinder function that automatically plays back a sensed image.

The system control circuit 50 executes a compression process in which various image processes are done using the memory control circuit 22 and image
20 processing circuit 20 if required by reading out sensed image data written in the memory 30, or an image is compressed in correspondence with the selected mode using the compression/expansion circuit 32 (step S1182). After that, the system control circuit 50 executes a
25 recording process for writing image data in the recording medium 500 or 510 such as a memory card,

compact flash card, or the like via the interface 90 or 94, and the connector 92 or 96 (step S1183).

The details of the flow of this compression process step S1182 are the same as those in the second
5 embodiment that has already been described using Fig. 8.

When the image display unit 28 is ON, a message

~~such as "BUSY" or the like that indicates that~~
is in progress is displayed on the image display unit 28 during a write of image data on the recording medium 500
10 or 510.

Furthermore, the indication unit 54 makes a recording medium write access indication by flickering an LED or the like in combination with the above message.

The system control circuit 50 continues quick
15 review display on the image display unit 28 until the shutter switch SW2 is released (step S1184). With this display, the user can carefully check the sensed image while pressing the shutter switch SW2.

If the shutter switch SW2 is released (step S1184),
20 the system control circuit 50 sets the panoramic image sensing start flag (step S1185) to indicate that the first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes. In this manner, as has been described in step S1142, the image sensing
25 direction can be inhibited from being reversed after the

first image is sensed in the horizontal or vertical panoramic mode.

The system control circuit 50 sets the variable n to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing region
5 (step S1186), and resets the variable m to $m = 1$ (step S1187). Then, the flow returns to step S1134 to repeat a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

S1134 upon releasing the shutter switch SW2, the next
10 image sensing region is selected in step S1146, the image sensing regions which include the previous image sensing region and display sensed images are set in the quick review state, and the next image sensing region is set in the through display state, so as to display the
15 sensed images and the next image to be sensed to overlap each other in step S1148, thus allowing the user to easily sense panoramic images.

Figs. 14A and 14B that have already been described show examples of the image sensing window before and
20 after completion of sensing of the n -th image in the horizontal panoramic mode.

Fig. 14A shows the image sensing window before sensing the first image, and Fig. 14B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2
25 after the first image is sensed. Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch

SW2 is released after the first image sensing, the first image sensing region in Fig. 14A on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

Figs. 15A and 15B that have already been described
5 show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the vertical panoramic mode.

Fig. 15A shows the image sensing window before
sensing the first image, and Fig. 15B shows the image
10 sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed. Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the first image sensing, the first image sensing region in Fig. 15A on the image sensing
15 window is set in a quick review display state.

Furthermore, Figs. 12A to 13B that have already been described show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the 2×2 panoramic mode.

20 Fig. 12A shows the image sensing window before the first image is sensed. Fig. 12B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed, i.e., before the second image is sensed.

25 Fig. 13A shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the second image

is sensed, i.e., before the third image is sensed, and Fig. 13B shows the image sensing window upon canceling the shutter switch SW2 after the third image is sensed, i.e., before the fourth image is sensed.

5 Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the n-th image sensing, the n-th image sensing region in Figs. 12A to 13B on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state. When the shutter
10 switch SW2 is released, a through display of the (n+1)-th image sensing region as the next region is added.

As described above, according to the fourth embodiment, after a series of panoramic image sensing
15 processes have started, a predetermined alert is generated upon detection of the absence of the lens unit 300, and the panoramic image sensing processes are temporarily interrupted to start a new series of panoramic image sensing processes. In this way, an image,
20 which is unsuitable for panoramic synthesis, can be prevented from being sensed when the lens unit 300 is exchanged by another lens unit with a different focal length during a series of panoramic image sensing processes.

25 (Fifth Embodiment)

Fig. 31 is a block diagram showing the arrangement of an image processing apparatus according to the fifth embodiment of the present invention.

In Fig. 31, only a difference from Fig. 16 will be explained.

Reference numeral 426 denotes a lens attachment/detachment switch used upon

processing apparatus 400.

10 The operation of the fifth embodiment will be explained below with reference to Figs. 32, 33, 34, 45, 36, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Note that the processes shown in Figs. 5, 6, 7, and 8 are the same as those in the second embodiment, and a detailed description thereof will be
15 omitted.

The operation of the image processing apparatus 400 will be described with the aid of Figs. 32, 33, 34, 35, and 36.

Upon power ON after battery exchange or the like,
20 the system control circuit 50 initializes flags, control variables, and the like, and initializes the respective units of the image processing apparatus 400 (step S1601).

The system control circuit 50 checks the setting position of the mode dial 60. If the mode dial 60 is set
25 at a power OFF position (step S1602), the system control circuit 50 executes a predetermined end process (step

S1603). More specifically, the system control circuit 50
changes the indications of the respective indication
units to an end state, protects an image sensing unit by
closing a barrier if the lens unit 300 comprises the
5 barrier or the like serving as a protection means,
records required parameters and setting values including
flags, control variables, and the like, and the setting

power supply to the respective units of the image
10 processing apparatus 400 including the image display
unit 28 by the power supply control means 80, and so
forth. After that, the flow returns to step S1602.

If the mode dial 60 is set at any of other mode
positions (step S1602), the system control circuit 50
15 checks using the power supply control means 80 if the
remaining capacity and operation state of the power
supply means 86 comprising batteries and the like pose
any problem in the operation of the image processing
apparatus 400 (step S1604). If any problem is found, a
20 predetermined alert indication is made by means of an
image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S1606),
and the flow then returns to step S1602.

When the image display of the image display unit
28 is ON, a predetermined alert display is made by means
25 of an image or voice also using the image display unit
28.

5 If no problem is found in the power supply means
86 (step S1604), the system control circuit 50 checks if
the operation state of the recording medium 500 or 510
poses any problem in the operation of the image
processing apparatus 400, in particular,
recording/playback of image data to/from the recording
medium (step S1605). If any problem is found, a

~~When such indication is made by means of an~~
image or voice using the indication unit 54 (step S1606),
10 and the flow then returns to step S1602.

When the image display of the image display unit 28 is ON, a predetermined alert display is made by means of an image or voice also using the image display unit 28.

15 If no problem is found in the operation state of
the recording medium 500 or 510 (step S1605), various
setting states of the image display apparatus 400 are
indicated by means of an image or voice using the
indication unit 54 (step S1607). When the image display
20 of the image display unit 28 is ON, various setting
states of the image display apparatus 400 are indicated
by means of an image or voice also using the image
display unit 28.

On the other hand, if the mode dial 60 is set at
25 an image sensing mode position (step S1608), a
predetermined image sensing process is executed (step

S1609). Upon completion of the process, the flow returns to step S1602.

If the mode dial 60 is set at any of other mode positions (step S1608), the system control circuit 50
5 executes a process corresponding to the selected mode (step S1610). Upon completion of the process, the flow returns to step S1602.

position (step S1608), the system control circuit 50
10 displays a panoramic mode selection window on the image display unit (step S1611).

The user of the image processing apparatus 400 can select an arbitrary one of a plurality of panoramic image sensing modes by observing the panoramic mode
15 selection window displayed on the image display unit 28.

The panoramic image sensing modes include a 2×2 panoramic mode, horizontal panoramic mode, vertical panoramic mode, and the like. In these modes, by combining a plurality of sensed images, a panoramic
20 image, which is extended two-dimensionally, horizontally, or vertically, can be obtained.

A series of sensed images are appended with information indicating their positional relationship, and can be combined to generate a signal panoramic image
25 by the image processing apparatus 400 itself or after they are transferred to, e.g., a computer or the like.

Note that an example of the panoramic mode selection window is the same as that shown in Fig. 9 that has already been explained.

Referring to Fig. 9, the left icon is used for
5 selecting the 2×2 panoramic mode for sensing a
two-dimensional panoramic image, the central icon is
used for selecting the horizontal panoramic mode for
~~sensing a horizontal panoramic image~~, and the right icon
is used for selecting a vertical panoramic mode for
10 sensing a vertical panoramic image.

The user of the image processing apparatus 400 can
select a desired panoramic mode by the selection/change
switch 66 (e.g., [+] key), and can determine that
panoramic mode by the determination/execution switch 68
15 (e.g., [SET] key).

When the panoramic mode is selected using the
selection/change switch 66 and determination/execution
switch 68, the system control circuit 50 sets initial
values and memory areas of flags, parameters, and
20 variables, reads out a display window serving as a user
interface, and so forth in a 2×2 panoramic mode
initial setup process (step S1613), a vertical panoramic
mode initial setup process (step S1614), or a horizontal
panoramic mode initial setup process (step S1615) in
25 correspondence with the selected panoramic mode (step
S1612), and displays a panoramic image sensing window

corresponding to the selected mode on the image display unit 28 (step S1616). The flow then advances to step S1631.

Note that Figs. 10A and 10B that have already been explained show examples of the horizontal panoramic mode image sensing window, Figs. 11A and 11B show examples of the vertical panoramic mode image sensing window, and Figs. 12A and 12B that have already been explained show examples of the 2 x 2 panoramic mode image sensing window.

Fig. 10A shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing to the left.

Referring to Figs. 10A and 10B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region "1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, rightward image sensing (Fig. 10A) or leftward image sensing (Fig. 10B) can be desirably selected using the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key).

The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button in desired one of the display window states shown in Figs. 10A and 10B.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the horizontal panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

Fig. 11A shows an image sensing window that
5 creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows an image sensing window that creates a panoramic window by continuously repeating image sensing downward.

Referring to Figs. 11A and 11B, a through image
10 from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on region "1" to sense the first image of a series of panoramic images. Before completion of image sensing of the first image, upward image sensing (Fig. 11A) or downward image sensing (Fig. 11B) can be desirably selected using the
15 selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key).

The image sensing direction is determined by sensing the first image by pressing the shutter button in desired one of the display window states shown in Figs. 11A and 11B.

20 Note that the user can end image sensing in the vertical panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

Fig. 12A shows an image sensing window for the first image upon creating a 2×2 panoramic window by
25 two-dimensionally repeating image sensing of a total of four images in the vertical and horizontal directions,

and Fig. 12B shows an image sensing window for the second image.

Referring to Figs. 12A and 12B, a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., an upper right region to sense the first one of panoramic images.

Upon completion of image sensing of the first

on, e.g., the upper right region, and a through image from the electronic viewfinder is displayed on, e.g., the lower right region to sense the second image.

The image sensing region of the electronic viewfinder is switched in turn to the next region after each image sensing. However, image sensing may be started from an arbitrary region, or may be redone by returning to the already sensed region. For this purpose, the image sensing region can be desirably shifted using the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] switch).

The image sensing region to be re-sensed is determined and image sensing is executed by pressing the shutter button in a display window state that selects a desired region.

Note that the user can end image sensing in the 2 × 2 panoramic mode by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key).

The system control circuit 50 initializes flags and variables set in its internal memory or the memory 52. For example, the system control circuit 50 resets a panoramic image sensing start flag (step S1631), sets
5 variables m and n, and initializes them to m = 1 and n = 1, respectively (steps S1633 and S1632).

~~Note that the panoramic image sensing start flag~~
is reset to indicate that no panoramic image sensing processes have been done.

10 Also, the variable n indicates the position of the current image sensing region in image sensing of each panoramic mode.

The variable m is used for returning the image sensing region of interest to the immediately preceding
15 region or canceling such return, upon executing image sensing again in the horizontal and vertical panoramic modes.

An example of the method of using these flag and variables will be explained later.

20 If the mode dial 60 is set at any of mode positions other than the panoramic mode (step S1634), the system control circuit 50 ends image sensing in the panoramic mode, and the flow returns to step S1602. In this manner, the user of the image processing apparatus
25 400 can end the panoramic mode anytime he or she wants, and can select another mode.

If end of the panoramic mode is selected by pressing the determination/execution switch 68 (e.g., [SET] key) (step S1635) while the mode dial 60 is kept set at the panoramic mode position (step S1634), i.e.,

5 the display window of the image display unit 28 keeps displaying the corresponding panoramic image sensing window, a panoramic mode end confirmation message is

selected (step S1636), the flow returns to step S1611 of

10 displaying the panoramic mode selection window.

The system control circuit 50 detects if operation for detaching the lens unit 300 using the lens attachment/detachment switch 426 is about to start (step S1661). If operation for detaching the lens unit 300 is

15 not about to start, the flow advances to step S1637.

If operation for detaching the lens unit 300 is about to start (step S1661), the system control circuit 50 checks the status of the panoramic image sensing start flag (step S1662).

20 If the panoramic image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., if the first image is not sensed yet in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S1662), the system control circuit 50 saves various kinds of information such as the setting mode, setting values,

25 and the like, which were used in the respective units of the image processing apparatus 400 while the lens unit

300 is attached to the apparatus 400, in a nonvolatile
memory in the lens system control circuit 350 via the
interface 420, connector 422, connector 322, and
interface 320 (step S1663), and permits detachment of
5 the lens unit 300 (step S1664). After that, the flow
advances to step S1637.

Note that a method of permitting detachment of the

mechanism such as an electromagnetic lock that inhibits
10 the lens unit from being detached, a method of removing
a cover of a detachment button of the lens unit 300, and
the like.

Various kinds of information saved in the
nonvolatile memory in the lens system control circuit
15 350 can be read and used again when the detached lens
unit 300 is attached to the image processing apparatus
400 again. With this control, the user need not repeat
various setups in correspondence with the lens unit 300
used every time he or she exchanges the lens unit 300,
20 resulting in convenience.

If the panoramic image sensing start flag is set,
i.e., if the first image has already been sensed in a
series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S1662),
the system control circuit 50 makes a predetermined
25 alert display by means of an image or voice using the
indication unit 54 and/or the image display unit 28

(step S1665). Furthermore, if confirmation of the end of a series of panoramic image sensing processes is selected (step S1666), the system control circuit 50 temporarily ends the series of panoramic image sensing processes executed so far, and the flow returns to step S1631 to start a new series of panoramic image sensing processes.

series of panoramic image sensing processes is selected
10 (step S1666), the flow advances to step S1637.

In this way, since the lens unit 300 is inhibited from being exchanged by another lens unit with a different focal length during a series of panoramic image sensing processes, an image, which is unsuitable for panoramic synthesis, can be prevented from being sensed.
15

If the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) has been pressed while the image display unit 28 displays one of the above-mentioned panoramic image sensing windows (step S1637), the system control circuit 50 executes a predetermined process in correspondence with the setups of the panoramic mode (step S1638).
20

If the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) is not pressed (step S1637), the flow advances to step
25 S1646.

-----If the 2 x 2 panoramic mode is selected (step
S1638), the system control circuit 50 sets the variable
n to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing
region (step S1639). If $n = 5$ (step S1640), the first
5 image sensing region is selected by setting $n = n - 4$
(step S1641). After that, the flow advances to step
S1646.

-----Specifically, every time the selection/change
switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) is pressed, the image sensing
10 region of interest shifts to one of the four image
sensing regions in the 2 x 2 panoramic mode. For example,
the image sensing region of interest shifts in the order
of the upper right region, lower right region, lower
left region, upper left region, upper right region,
15 lower right region,....

On the other hand, if the horizontal or vertical
panoramic mode is selected (step S1638), and if the
panoramic image sensing start flag is reset, i.e., if
the first image is not sensed yet in a series of
20 panoramic image sensing processes (step S1642), the
system control circuit 50 reverses the image sensing
direction of the selected panoramic mode (step S1643).
After that, the flow advances to step S1646.

Note that the image sensing direction can be
25 repetitively reversed before the first image is sensed.

Figs. 10A and 10B that have already been described show examples of an image sensing direction reverse window in the horizontal panoramic mode.

Fig. 10A shows a window upon repeating image sensing to the right, and Fig. 10B shows a window upon repeating image sensing to the left.

Figs. 11A and 11B that have already been described

window in the vertical panoramic mode.

Fig. 11A shows a window upon repeating image sensing upward, and Fig. 11B shows a window upon repeating image sensing downward.

On the other hand, if the horizontal or vertical panoramic mode is selected (step S1638) and if the panoramic image sensing start flag is set, i.e., if the first image has already been sensed in a series of panoramic image sensing processes (step S1642), the system control circuit 50 computes $m = m \times (-1)$, the sign of which changes like -1, +1, -1, +1, ... in every computation (step S1644), and also computes $n = n + m$ for the variable n, which changes like $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, $n = n - 1$, $n = n + 1$, ... in every computation (step S1645). After that, the flow advances to step S1646.

With this control, movement to the already sensed region (which is limited to the lastly sensed one) or

cancel that movement can be repetitively selected to sense an image again.

After panoramic image sensing of the n-th image region, the user presses the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the (n-1)-th and n-th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions. Then, the user temporarily releases

display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) once again to display the original quick review image on the n-th image region and a through image on the (n+1)-th image region, thus executing the next panoramic image sensing.

After panoramic image sensing of the n-th image region, upon pressing the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to confirm if quick review images of the (n-1)-th and n-th image regions smoothly join at their boundary regions, if the user determines that image sensing must be redone, he or she temporarily releases the selection/change switch 66 (e.g., [+] key) to display a through image on the n-th image region, and presses the shutter switch SW2 in that window state to replace the image with the newly sensed image. Then, the user can execute the next panoramic image sensing.

The system control circuit 50 selects the n-th image region (step S1646). If the window layout must be changed in correspondence with the selected image region (step S1647), the system control circuit 50 switches and
5 displays a new window layout (step S1648) The flow then advances to step S1691.

In this fashion, a window corresponding to the reversed image sensing direction, as described above, a window corresponding to the changed image sensing region,
10 a window that has updated characters and images for comments, or the like can be displayed as needed.

Upon sensing the second and subsequent images, the image sensing regions that display the already sensed images are set in a quick review display state, and the
15 image sensing region selected for the next image sensing is set in a through display state, thus displaying a playback image of the already sensed image and the next image to be sensed to partially overlap each other. In this manner, the user of the image processing apparatus
20 400 can easily determine the next image sensing angle.

The system control circuit 50 checks if the lens unit 300 is attached to the image processing apparatus 400 (step S1691). If the lens unit 300 is attached, the flow advances to step S1693.

25 On the other hand, if the lens unit 300 is not attached to the image processing apparatus 400 (step

S1691), display indicating that no lens is attached is made using the indication unit 54 and/or the image display unit 28 to call user's attention (step S1692). The flow then returns to step S1634.

5 In this manner, since image sensing without the lens unit 300 is inhibited during a series of panoramic image sensing processes, an image, which is unsuitable

~~for panoramic syntheses, can be prevented from being~~
sensed.

10 If the system control circuit 50 determines that a new lens unit 300 is attached and various kinds of setting information saved in the lens unit 300 must be read (step S1693), it reads identification information such as a number unique to the lens unit 300 or the like,
15 management information, function information such as a full-open aperture value and minimum aperture value, focal length, and the like, and the current and previous setting values, which are saved in the nonvolatile memory in the lens system control circuit 350, and/or
20 various kinds of information such as the setting mode, setting values, and the like, which were used in the respective units of the image processing apparatus while the lens unit 300 was attached to the image processing apparatus 400 previously, onto its internal registers
25 and/or the memory 52 via the interface 320, connector 322, connector 422, and interface 420 (step S1694).

Note that the saved various setting values include,

for example, the zoom focal length, the operation mode used such as a shutter speed priority AE mode or aperture priority AE mode, sports image sensing mode,

- 5 landscape image sensing mode, panoramic image sensing mode, and the like, the ON/OFF state of a camera shake prevention function, and the like.

corresponding modes suitable for image sensing using the
10 attached lens unit 300 on the basis of various kinds of read setting information (step S1695), and the flow then advances to step S1671.

Note that various corresponding modes are set as follows. For example, when the lens unit 300 is a

- 15 telephoto lens or telephoto zoom lens, the contents of the operation mode display list of the image processing apparatus 400 are limited to only the shutter speed priority AE mode, sports image sensing mode, and the like; the shutter speed priority AE mode, sports image
20 sensing mode, and the like are displayed at easy-to-select positions; one of the shutter speed priority AE mode, sports image sensing mode, and the like is set as a default mode; and so forth.

- On the other hand, when the lens unit 300 is a
25 wide-angle lens or wide-angle zoom lens, the contents of the operation mode display list of the image processing

apparatus 400 are limited to only the aperture priority
AE mode, landscape image sensing mode, panoramic image
sensing mode, and the like; the aperture priority AE
mode, landscape image sensing mode, panoramic image
5 sensing mode, and the like are displayed at
easy-to-select positions; one of the aperture priority
AE mode, landscape image sensing mode, panoramic image

so forth.

10 Furthermore, since various kinds of information
saved in the nonvolatile memory in the lens system
control circuit 350 upon detachment of the lens unit 300
can be read and used when the detached lens unit 300 is
attached to the image processing apparatus 400 again,
15 the user need not repeat various setups in
correspondence with the lens unit 300 used every time he
or she exchanges the lens unit 300, resulting in
convenience.

On the other hand, some or all of various kinds of
20 information saved in the nonvolatile memory in the lens
system control circuit 350 upon detachment of the lens
unit 300 may not be used in correspondence with the date,
day of the week, elapsed time, user information, and the
like upon attachment of the detached lens unit 300 to
25 the image processing apparatus 400 again. With this
control, when the lens unit is exchanged frequently, the

need for repeating various setups can be obviated. Also, when previous setups have no significance upon exchanging the lens unit after several days, default values may be set.

- 5 Moreover, when user information saved in the nonvolatile memory in the lens system control circuit 350 is used, the need for repeating various setups

the image processing apparatus 400 can be obviated.

- 10 If the system control circuit 50 determines that lens unit 300 remains attached and various setups saved in the lens unit 300 need not be read (step S1693), the flow advances to step S1671.

- 15 The system control circuit 50 sets a through display state in which sensed image data is displayed as it is sensed (step S1671), and the flow advances to step S1672.

- 20 In through display, data, which have been written in the image display memory 24 via the image sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22, are displayed on the aforementioned image sensing region of the image display unit 28 via the memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thereby implementing an electronic
25 viewfinder function.

sensing element 14, A/D converter 16, image processing
circuit 20, and memory control circuit 22 or directly
from the A/D converter 16 via the memory control circuit
22, and a development process for executing various
5 processes by reading out image data written in the
memory 30 using the memory control circuit 22 and image
processing circuit 20 if required (step S1679).

The details of the flow of this image sensing
process step S1679 are the same as those in the second
10 embodiment that has already been described using Fig. 6.

The system control circuit 50 executes a display
image process for reading out image data written in the
memory 30 by the image sensing process in step S1679,
and transferring the readout data to the image display
15 memory 24 via the memory control circuit 22 (step S1680).

The details of the flow of this display image
process step S1680 are the same as those in the second
embodiment that has already been described using Fig. 7.

The system control circuit 50 sets the display
20 state of the image display unit 28 in a quick review
display state (step S1681), and the flow advances to
step S1682.

In quick review display, image data transferred to
the image display memory 24 by the display image process
25 in step S1680 is displayed on the aforementioned image
sensing region of the image display unit 28 via the

memory control circuit 22 and D/A converter 26, thus implementing an electronic viewfinder function that automatically plays back a sensed image.

The system control circuit 50 executes a
5 compression process in which various image processes are done using the memory control circuit 22 and image processing circuit 20 if required by reading out sensed

compressed in correspondence with the selected mode
10 using the compression/expansion circuit 32 (step S1682). After that, the system control circuit 50 executes a recording process for writing image data in the recording medium 500 or 510 such as a memory card, compact flash card, or the like via the interface 90 or
15 94, and the connector 92 or 96 (step S1683).

The details of the flow of this compression process step S1682 are the same as those in the second embodiment that has already been described using Fig. 8.

When the image display unit 28 is ON, a message
20 such as "BUSY" or the like that indicates that a write is in progress is displayed on the image display unit 28 during a write of image data on the recording medium 500 or 510.

Furthermore, the indication unit 54 makes a
25 recording medium write access indication by flickering an LED or the like in combination with the above message.

The system control circuit 50 continues quick
review display on the image display unit 28 until the
shutter switch SW2 is released (step S1684). With this
display, the user can carefully check the sensed image
5 while pressing the shutter switch SW2.

If the shutter switch SW2 is released (step S1684),
the system control circuit 50 sets the panoramic image

first image has already been sensed in a series of
10 panoramic image sensing processes. In this manner, as
has been described in step S1642, the image sensing
direction can be inhibited from being reversed after the
first image is sensed in the horizontal or vertical
panoramic mode.

15 The system control circuit 50 sets the variable n
to be $n = n + 1$ to select the next image sensing region
(step S1686), and resets the variable m to $m = 1$ (step
S1687). Then, the flow returns to step S1634 to repeat a
series of panoramic image sensing processes.

20 In this manner, after the control returns to step
S1634 upon releasing the shutter switch SW2, the next
image sensing region is selected in step S1646, the
image sensing regions which include the previous image
sensing region and display sensed images are set in the
25 quick review state, and the next image sensing region is
set in the through display state, so as to display the

sensed images and the next image to be sensed to overlap each other in step S1648, thus allowing the user to easily sense panoramic images.

Figs. 14A and 14B that have already been described show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the horizontal panoramic mode.

image sensing window before
sensing the first image, and Fig. 14B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed. Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the first image sensing, the first image sensing region in Fig. 14A on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

Figs. 15A and 15B that have already been described show examples of the image sensing window before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the vertical panoramic mode.

Fig. 15A shows the image sensing window before sensing the first image, and Fig. 15B shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed. Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released after the first image sensing, the first

image sensing region in Fig. 15A on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state.

Furthermore, Figs. 12A to 13B that have already been described show examples of the image sensing window
5 before and after completion of sensing of the n-th image in the 2 × 2 panoramic mode.

Fig. 12A shows the image sensing window before the

10 window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the first image is sensed, i.e., before the second image is sensed.

Fig. 13A shows the image sensing window upon releasing the shutter switch SW2 after the second image is sensed, i.e., before the third image is sensed, and
15 Fig. 13B shows the image sensing window upon canceling the shutter switch SW2 after the third image is sensed, i.e., before the fourth image is sensed.

Although no dedicated explanatory view is available, before the shutter switch SW2 is released
20 after the n-th image sensing, the n-th image sensing region in Figs. 12A to 13B on the image sensing window is set in a quick review display state. When the shutter switch SW2 is released, a through display of the (n+1)-th image sensing region as the next region is
25 added.

As described above, according to the fifth embodiment, since the lens unit 300 is inhibited from being exchanged by another lens unit with a different focal length after the start of a series of panoramic image sensing processes, an image, which is unsuitable for panoramic synthesis, can be prevented from being sensed and paired with the previously sensed image.

10 sensing processes are temporarily interrupted and a new series of panoramic image sensing processes are started, the lens unit 300 is inhibited from being exchanged by another lens unit with a different focal length, and an image, which is unsuitable for panoramic synthesis, can be prevented from being sensed and paired with the
15 previously sensed image.

Furthermore, since various kinds of information saved in the nonvolatile memory in the lens system control circuit 350 upon detachment of the lens unit 300 can be read and used when the detached lens unit 300 is
20 attached to the image processing apparatus 400 again, the user need not repeat various setups in correspondence with the lens unit 300 used every time he or she exchanges the lens unit 300.

The fourth and fifth embodiments of the present
25 invention have been explained.

In the description of the embodiments, if confirmation of the end of a series of panoramic image sensing processes is selected in step S1665, the flow returns to step S1631 to start a new series of panoramic
5 image sensing processes. Alternatively, the flow may return to step S1611 to restart setups from the panoramic mode selection window, and then a new series
~~of panoramic image sensing processes may start.~~

Note that the number of types of selectable
10 panoramic modes on the panoramic mode selection window is 3, i.e., the 2×2 panoramic mode, horizontal panoramic mode, and vertical panoramic mode. However, the present invention is not limited to these specific modes, and one or a plurality of types of an arbitrary
15 number of different panoramic modes may be selectable.

Also, display of the panoramic mode selection window shown in Fig. 9 is not limited to this example. Alternatively, display with an arbitrary layout or scheme using an image or voice may be made.

20 On the 2×2 panoramic mode image sensing window, a total of four images are two-dimensionally laid out in a 2×2 matrix. However, the present invention is not limited to such matrix. For example, an arbitrary number of images such as a total of nine images, a total of 16
25 images, and the like may be laid out in a two-dimensional or three-dimensional matrix.

On the horizontal and vertical panoramic mode image sensing windows, two images are continuously displayed. However, the present invention is not limited to such specific display, an arbitrary number of images (e.g., three images, four images, and the like) may be one-dimensionally displayed.

The displays of the panoramic mode image sensing

these examples, and displays with arbitrary layouts and schemes using images, voices, characters, symbols, and the like may be made.

In the horizontal and vertical panoramic modes, the image sensing direction is inhibited from being reversed after the first image is sensed. However, the present invention is not limited to this, and the image sensing direction may be reversed as needed. Also, the image sensing direction may be changed in one of arbitrary directions including the right and left directions, up and down directions, or oblique directions. In the present invention, when a large number of image display regions can be simultaneously displayed by increasing the display area of the image display unit 28, the image sensing direction can be changed in one of arbitrary directions including the right and left directions, up and down directions, or oblique directions.

Image sensing can be redone for only the immediately preceding sensed image in the horizontal and vertical panoramic modes. However, the present invention is not limited to this. For example, image sensing may
5 be redone for a sensed image an arbitrary number of times before.

The next image display region for displaying an

and that for displaying the already sensed image is set
10 in the quick review display state, to display a playback image of the already sensed image and the next image to be sensed so that their boundary regions partially overlap each other. However, the present invention is not limited to such specific scheme. For example, the
15 images may be displayed without making their boundary regions overlap each other.

In the explanatory views of the panoramic modes in Figs. 10A to 15B, for example, comment words "LIVE" and "FREEZE" are added within the image display regions.
20 However, the actual image display unit 28 may or may not display these comment words.

A plurality of lens units 300 may be detachably attached to the image processing apparatus 400.

The recording media 500 and 510 are not limited to
25 memory cards such as PCMCIA cards, compact flash cards, or the like, hard disks, and the like, but may use micro

DATs (digital audio tapes), magnetooptical disks, optical disks such as CD-Rs, CD-WRs, or the like, phase change optical disks such as DVDs, and the like.

Also, the recording media 500 and 510 may use
5 hybrid media that integrate memory cards, hard disks, and the like. Furthermore, such hybrid media may include detachable media.

embodiments, the recording media 500 and 510 are
10 independent from the image processing apparatus 400 and are arbitrarily connectable. One or both the recording media 500 and 510 may be permanently connected to the image processing apparatus 400.

An arbitrary number (one or a plurality) of image
15 recording media 500 or 510 may be connectable to the image processing apparatus 400.

In the above description, the recording media 500 and 510 are attached to the image processing apparatus. However, one or a combination of a plurality of
20 recording media may be used.

Synthesis of a panoramic image has been described as an example in which a plurality of images are associated. Also, the present invention can be applied to a case wherein a plurality of images are sensed while
25 shifting pixels, and a high-resolution image is obtained by synthesizing these images.

To restate, the fourth and fifth embodiments can solve the conventional problem that image quality deteriorates considerably due to extra correction computations required to correct different focal lengths
5 between the previous and current lenses exchanged upon generating a panoramic image by combining a plurality of sensed images.

the conventional problems that the outer shape of a
10 synthesized panoramic image varies in units of sensed image and has steps when the individual sensed images have considerably different angles due to exchange of the photographing lens with another lens with a different focal length.

15 Furthermore, the fourth and fifth embodiments can solve the conventional problem that the user must repeat setups to obtain the previous setup state in correspondence with the photographing lens upon attachment of the detached photographing lens.

20 (Another Embodiment)

Note that the present invention may be applied to either a system constituted by a plurality of equipments (e.g., a host computer, an interface device, a reader, a printer, and the like), or an apparatus consisting of a
25 single equipment (e.g., a copying machine, a facsimile apparatus, or the like).

The objects of the present invention are also
achieved by supplying a storage medium, which records a
program code of a software program that can realize the
functions of the above-mentioned embodiments to the
5 system or apparatus, and reading out and executing the
program code stored in the storage medium by a computer
(or a CPU or MPU) of the system or apparatus.

from the storage medium realizes the functions of the
10 above-mentioned embodiments, and the storage medium
which stores the program code constitutes the present
invention.

As the storage medium for supplying the program
code, for example, a floppy disk, hard disk, optical
15 disk, magneto-optical disk, CD-ROM, CD-R, magnetic tape,
nonvolatile memory card, ROM, and the like may be used.

The functions of the above-mentioned embodiments
may be realized not only by executing the readout
program code by the computer but also by some or all of
20 actual processing operations executed by an OS
(operating system) running on the computer on the basis
of an instruction of the program code.

Furthermore, the functions of the above-mentioned
embodiments may be realized by some or all of actual
25 processing operations executed by a CPU or the like
arranged in a function extension board or a function

extension unit, which is inserted in or connected to the computer, after the program code read out from the storage medium is written in a memory of the extension board or unit.

5 The present invention is not limited to the above
embodiments and various changes and modifications may
can be made within the spirit and scope of the present